

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
STORY AND SONG

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ABSTRACT

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As a Unitarian Universalist minister and a leader in our congregations for twenty-five years, it is apparent to me that Unitarian Universalists struggle with our identity because we embrace many faith traditions and religious beliefs. We also cannot easily and readily express what Unitarian Universalism is or what our beliefs are. If we cannot express our identity, we risk losing current members and youth or not bringing in new members. Reduced numbers results in irrelevance in our changing world.

I created a questionnaire and interviewed almost fifty ministers, religious educators, and music directors. I used qualitative analysis to determine the themes that bind us as Unitarian Universalists and discovered that our stories are not told enough nor are they readily available. As a result of this research I created a website called www.ourstoriesandsongs.com that affirms and strengthens our understanding of who we are through the stories we tell and the songs we sing. Through the resources on this website we can further instill a Unitarian Universalist identity for those who gather for worship, community and religious education.

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To my father who encouraged me,
my mother who supported me
and my husband who loved me through it all.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

Part I

I have been serving as a Unitarian Universalist minister since 1999. I have served four congregations in different capacities: I was the only minister of a small congregation for four years in Montgomery, Alabama; I was the Associate minister at a mid-size congregation for two years in New York City, New York; I was the Religious Education Minister in Ridgewood, New Jersey for four years and now I am serving my fourth congregation as the minister in Plainfield, New Jersey. I have served congregations in the South and North, both small and mid-size, on my own and with other ministers. I have almost fifteen years of experience as a religious educator and as a minister and another ten years of lay experience in Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Over these almost twenty-five years there has been little growth in our denomination as a whole. The numbers of those who do not consider themselves religious or who have no connection to a congregation has risen. Most of the Unitarian Universalist congregations are small and in these small denominations the dominant theological position is atheist/secular humanist. Over the last twenty-five years we have had a controversy over religious language, changes in leadership and governance, more pro-active work in multiculturalism and inclusivity, and an intensified focus on social justice.

We have been struggling with what other religions face, which is, diminishing numbers. But we have our unique problems as well. It will be helpful in understanding

the bigger picture that this demonstration paper intends to address if we can take a closer look at one congregation in particular.

Part II

The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield makes its home in Plainfield, New Jersey located in Union County. It is 24 miles southwest of New York City, 18 miles from Newark and 12 miles from Elizabeth. Plainfield is the core city among several surrounding communities like Fanwood, Scotch Plains, Dunellen, Piscataway, South Plainfield, Edison, Metuchen, North Plainfield and Green Brook. Families in the congregation come from all of these towns, as well as others in addition to Plainfield. It is said that as many as 42 communities are represented in our one congregation.

Plainfield was settled in 1684 by Quakers but by the time of its incorporation in 1869 the religious diversity of the town had grown to include Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and others.¹ By the late 1880's, this religious diversity grew to include the liberal Unitarians. On July 10, 1889 a formal meeting was held in the free library to establish a Board and to elect trustees for the new Unitarian congregation. Job Male, Plainfield's first mayor, was one of the newly elected trustees. Services were held in his home on Second Place. The Reverend William P. Tilden was the first minister of the new congregation.²

On January 13, 1890, the society held its first annual meeting with 44 members on the roll. At a special meeting in February of 1891, the congregation voted to build a stone

¹ City of Plainfield, New Jersey, <http://www.plainfield.com/history.aspx> (accessed Month 9, 2099)

² First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, www.fusp.org (accessed Month 9, 2099)

structure on the current property site on Park Avenue. The architect O.M. Teale designed the building with rusticated stone, multiple windows, turrets and towers placed asymmetrically. The new building was completed in April 1892 and christened All Souls Church a month later. At the dedication, the Rev. Hobart Clark explained that “within its doors all souls, whatever their belief or want of belief, whatever be their worldly circumstance or their spiritual needs, shall find a welcome, a refuge and home.”³ It is now the oldest Unitarian Church in New Jersey.⁴

Plainfield’s growth was due in large part to the railroad. Plainfield became a commuter town for New York City with many city dwellers spending their summers and vacations in the “country” and eventually building their homes there. By 1884, the railroad had greatly changed the economy and industries of the city. The grist mill and farm life were replaced by factories that made hats, clothes and carriages. Manufacturing companies of many varieties settled in Plainfield and changed the town further.⁵

As the town grew, two distinct districts emerged. On the West side of town, low cost housing for lower-income residents sat next to run-down houses, dollar stores and fast-food restaurants. On the Eastside were the wealthier residents with their expansive landscaped yards, their huge maple trees and their homes with as many as ten bedrooms, a ballroom and servant quarters on the multiple floors. The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield sits on the border between both of these districts.

³ *The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, New Jersey: Pictures with Historical Backgrounds of Memorials and Gifts 1889-1989 (printed for the Centennial Celebration)*, 5.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Westfield, New Jersey, <http://westfieldnj.com/whs/history/Counties/UnionCounty/plainfield.htm> (accessed Month 9, 2099)

The marked border between the two areas of Plainfield contributed to the race riots in July of 1967. The Plainfield race riots were part of a series of racially-charged episodes that also impacted other cities like Newark, New Jersey. There were violent demonstrations stemming from the anger of the younger, mostly male Black population around education, housing and a lack of jobs. By the end of the week-long disturbances, one white police officer was dead and over 50 Black citizens were injured. Another 100 people were arrested for looting and rioting by the time the National Guard and State police were pulled out of the city.⁶

In the forty-five years since the riots, it is arguable whether things have improved for the Black population of Plainfield. Unemployment is still high among young Black men, the education system is challenging and even dangerous (ranking Plainfield High School among the top five violent schools in New Jersey), and the gang violence is ranked second in Union county. While Black people have gained more political clout and it is the view of many people that there is little money in the system to make any real difference. As for the White population, there was tremendous White flight following the race riots of the sixties. At the time of the 2010 Census, the racial make-up of Plainfield is about 23% White, 50% African American, 40% Hispanic with the rest of the population consisting of various other nationalities and races (some races declared in two categories).⁷ In speaking with Cory Storch, a councilman in Plainfield, he further broke down these numbers from the Census. He said that the White population is more like 9 to

⁶ Academic, <http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/1050584> (accessed Month 9, 2099)

⁷ American Fact Finder, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (accessed Month 9, 2099)

11%, African American 63% and the Hispanic population would cover the remaining 26%. He explains that the numbers do not add up to 100% because several groups of people self-identify in several ways. For instance, some people in the Hispanic/Latino population might self-identify as White or Hispanic or by their country of origin, such as Guatemalan or Columbian.⁸ This ability to report in this way distorts actual numbers (we cannot add up the numbers to 100%) but at the same time more accurately reflects those who are being counted because it is based on their understanding of who they are.

The Hispanic or Latino population continues to grow with many of the stores and restaurants in Plainfield serving food from Central or South America and a vast majority of businesses publicizing in both English and Spanish. On the edge of town, Hispanic and Latino day workers line the curbs waiting for a day's work.

While many congregations, families and businesses have left Plainfield over the years, the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield has made a commitment to stay in Plainfield from its very beginning. When Plainfield was a bedroom community of New York, the commitment was not difficult, but this continued commitment to remain in Plainfield has not diminished as the nature and culture of the town has changed.

The Unitarian congregation has been in Plainfield 123 years. Through these years, several themes have appeared repeatedly and quite consistently and continue to be present today. First, it has been important through all the years that the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield be a voice of liberal religion to Plainfield and to the surrounding municipalities. When the congregation was founded, there were several Christian churches in the area, including the Quakers, but no religion espoused a liberal Christian

⁸ Conversation with Cory Storch, December 4, 2012

view. The first two services of the congregation were held in the church of the Seventh Day Baptists, but the liberal view of a unity of God rather than a trinity frightened the Baptists and further use of their space was declined. The acceptance of Unitarian ministers into the Plainfield Minister's Association was a long journey but through the hard work of Rev. Alson Robinson it was finally accomplished and deemed successful when he was elected president of the organization in 1943.⁹ Around this time the congregation was also accepted into the Council of Churches of Plainfield which was dominated by Protestant churches.

In more recent history, though the neighborhood has changed and less and less people in the pews are actually from Plainfield, the congregation remains committed to the Queen City. In part this is due to her historic landmark building, in part it is a sense of obligation to Plainfield and in part it is her member's sense of social justice and service that keeps this congregation here. The vision statement of the congregation speaks to this continued commitment into our future: *Together we seek to grow as a vibrant presence in our community through sharing our welcoming faith and working to build a just world.*

In January, the congregation will meet in small group format to disseminate once again what we mean by the word *community* in our vision statement. Once we have created a consensus around this we will embark on a strategic plan leading, ultimately, to a capital campaign that will support our vision.

The second theme running through our history and into present times is our commitment to social justice. In the early years of the congregation, as ministers arrived and departed, this commitment is not readily apparent; however, because it is a basic

⁹ *The first 75 Years: 1889-1964, The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, New Jersey, May 1964*, 8.

tenet of Unitarianism, Universalism, and Unitarian Universalism, it can be implicitly understood that this was part of the very nature of the congregation. In 1920, with the call of Rev. Alson Robinson the work of social justice becomes more visible and explicit. He “wished to know everything, to say everything, to change everything wrong, to exalt everything good and to have the world join him in all of it.”¹⁰ His sermons included a series on the leaders of contemporary social movements and also Christianity and Race. He was known to be involved in all aspects of the Plainfield community. When World War II erupted, the church voted to recognize conscientious objectors and provide any necessary protection for them. At the same time, many of the members of the congregation served in the military. At one point, Rev. Robinson was personally corresponding with 90 Unitarian men in the service.¹¹

Each subsequent minister at the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield led the congregation in social justice activities, and of course, sometimes the lay leadership in the congregation took the lead roles. The minister after Rev. Robinson was Rev. Mortimer Gesner whose principle concern was “the achievement of love and peace between individuals and within each individual.”¹²

It is noted that much of the activities of the congregation mirrored that of the American Unitarian Association and the concerns of the nation at large. By the late 1950’s, civil rights and race issues were coming into sharp focus for the congregation. At the annual meeting in 1959, several resolutions were adopted that included that the life

¹⁰ Ibid, 13.

¹¹ Ibid, 8.

¹² Elizabeth Mitchell, *On the Occasion of the Centennial Celebration of the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield*, New Jersey, 1989, 4.

of the Civil Rights Commission be extended, that Unitarian churches be urged to achieve full integration, that the congregation be life members of the NAACP, and that the House Committee on Un-American Activities be abolished.¹³

With the resignation of Rev. Gesner, the church looked for a minister that would continue the enlivened social awareness of the congregation. In 1960, the Rev. Nick Cardell was called to serve the congregation (A side note, Rev. Nick Cardell served a six month prison sentence for trespassing at the School of the America's in 1998- in his seventies!). The congregation continued its involvement with the civil rights movement and added a nuclear sane policy to its agenda. The 60's exploded with social turbulence and the Unitarian society found a vital role to play in Plainfield. In 1964, near the time of the race riots, the following announcement was run in the Courier News: "The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield rejoices in the passage of the Civil rights Bill. As always, we welcome people of all races."¹⁴ In addition to race issues, the church was involved with voter registration, protesting police violence, addressing poverty and education issues in Plainfield.

In the 70s, 80s and 90s, the congregation was involved with women's rights, gay and lesbian issues, homelessness, mental health, and anti-war (peace) campaigns. In 1978 the first openly gay minister of the congregation was called. In 1989, the first female minister was called to serve the congregation. The first ministerial intern, a woman, served the congregation in 1985-1986.

¹³ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴ Ibid, 9

Today, social justice issues continue to be a relevant and important aspect of congregational life. The congregation has a food pantry that is open to area residents two Saturdays a month. The last Sunday of the month and several major holidays the members of the congregation serve over 200 hot meals to hungry or homeless people in the community. Project Hope partners with several churches and other organizations to address teen violence and gang membership. Members work with El Centro and Angels in Action to serve the needs of the Hispanic/Latino and immigrant populations of Plainfield. Several adult programs and lifespan religious education opportunities are focused on immigration issues. The church has ongoing relationships with HomeFirst (an organization that seeks to find homes for the homeless of Union County), the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and many local organizations in Plainfield that work to improve the lives of Plainfield citizens. In addition to these programs and ministries, we have a budding new mental health ministry in partnership with Bridgeway, an organization that works with those who suffer with or have recovered from mental illness.

The third theme is that of a struggle with finances. This appears at the very beginning of the organization of the church when it was voted that the cost of building a stone structure could not exceed \$12,500. In order to accomplish this, the builders had to “cut all building and interior items to the barest necessities.”¹⁵ Repeatedly and annually the theme of a budget shortfall or lack of funds is reported in the minutes of congregational meetings. At least twice, the ministers were asked to accept less money in salary for the next budget year. Some years were more prosperous than others allowing

¹⁵ *The first 75 Years: 1889-1964, The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, New Jersey, May 1964, 3.*

for additions to the building to be constructed but nevertheless, the constant concern for upkeep and maintenance has been a recurring issue. The scarcity mentality of the congregation has led to very tight budgets year after year. The cutbacks and austerity measures provoked by a lack of rentals or less than anticipated pledges or low membership continue to the present day. Our conversations today consist of questions like how can we do social justice in the community when our building takes up much of our capital? Can we maintain an historic building with only 175 adult members? A scarcity mentality and a lack of clarity around increasing our income is the dominating paradigm in the congregation thus hindering living our vision, growing our community and being a vital presence in Plainfield.

The final theme is that of commitment to the church community itself which includes the adult members and the children and youth as well as the programs and ministries of the congregation. With the waxing and waning membership in her 123 years of existence, so, too, the programs and ministries have waxed and waned. Yet even with cash flow issues and some short minister tenures there have always been vital programs to serve the various needs of the congregants. In 1889, the Women's Church House Society (a forerunner to the present day Women's Alliance) was organized.¹⁶ It is the oldest, continuing ministry in the history of the congregation. From their inception to today, this women's group has contributed to the health and vitality of the congregation. They have helped with budgetary shortfalls; they bought and later refurbished the organ, they paid for the remodeling of the kitchen, and on and on. Today the Women's Alliance continues to enrich the lives of the women members through interesting and diverse

¹⁶ Ibid, 2.

programs and support of the Green Sanctuary movement, the fair trade coffee table, and scholarships for young women going to college. Other ministries have existed over the years to support the different constituencies in the congregation such as the Men's Group, groups for young adults, small group ministry, Parish Players, the Arts committee, and various discussion groups.

The Religious Education Program has been another ongoing ministry of the congregation almost since its inception. The RE program provides instruction to kindergarten through thirteen year olds. A youth group offers educational and service opportunities for teenagers. There are four outstanding religious education programs for participants in the program in addition to various curricula that might vary from year to year. These are Our Whole Lives Lifespan Sexuality Curriculum (all ages), the Coming of Age Program (eighth graders), Age of Reason (third graders), and Neighboring Faiths (sixth and seventh graders). Children in the RE program know they are valued members of the congregation and every effort is made to help them understand in their minds and hearts that they are part of and responsible to the church community.

One last thing to mention that conveys a commitment to our congregational community is our devotion to our historic building. The records show a not so unusual struggle throughout our history of having enough money to expand the building (several times) to not having enough money to fix the roof or upgrade the bathrooms or fire alarm system. This fiscal fluctuation has led to an historic building in constant need of repair and maintenance but at the same time conveys a dedication to keeping this historic building (and thus a liberal religious voice) in the Plainfield community. For the last several years, we have been undergoing a renovation project that has restored some of the

original beauty of the building. The two porches and roof have been repaired, the kitchen has been partially upgraded and a lift has been added to the building to make it more accessible. People are dedicated to our building which is a New Jersey and a National Historic Landmark and, by extension, to the community of Unitarian Universalists (and others) who meet to use our space.

The history of the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield mirrors the significant social aspects of the Unitarian Universalist Association to which the Society belongs. Unitarian Universalists have always been socially conscious and, in fact, have been instrumental in many social justice issues from abolition to getting the women the vote, from affirmative action to ending poverty, from marriage equality to immigration reform. The causes we take up are always in defense of the inherent worth and dignity for each person and support the other principles of our faith.

These principles are:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The theological diversity present in the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield is also reflected in the greater Unitarian Universalist Association. From the minutes and histories written about the congregation it is not clear the theological evolution of a congregation that was once called All Souls and is now referred to as the First Unitarian Society of

Plainfield. Today, the spectrum of theologies in society is reflected in the congregation. That is to say, we do not have a dogma or creed so our congregations are rather diverse theologically. While many Unitarian Universalists might describe themselves as agnostic or atheist (generally about 46%), there are also people who would describe themselves as spiritual or theists. In fact, most people coming into the congregation today are more spiritual than those who were coming into the congregation thirty years ago. There has been a real shift in the last decade over language and reverence and spirituality that has created a wider space for theological diversity in our congregations but has also created more opportunities and challenges for conversation and growth.

For a fuller history on Unitarian Universalism, see Appendices B and C.

Challenge Statement

As the minister of the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield in Plainfield, New Jersey, and a leader in our congregations for twenty years, it is apparent to me that Unitarian Universalists struggle with our identity because we embrace many faith traditions and religious beliefs. If we cannot express our identity, we risk losing current members and youth or not bringing in new members. Reduced numbers results in irrelevance in our changing world. This demonstration project aims to create an educational process that affirms and strengthens our understanding of who we are and further instills a Unitarian Universalist identity for those who gather for worship, community and service.

CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

In 2011, the Unitarian Universalists celebrated fifty years as an association, the Unitarians and the Universalists having merged in May of 1961. This anniversary had us celebrating our past as well as looking towards our future. In the 2011 winter edition of the UU World magazine the cover article called *Faith in our Future: What do we need to meet the challenges of our time?* had six prominent Unitarian Universalist ministers share their thoughts on the future of our faith. These presentations were from the 2011 Minns Lecture series moderated by the Rev. Larry Peers. In his opening remarks, he asked, “How big is our faith? How big is our faith to hold and heal ourselves, to grapple with the emerging twenty-first century? How big is our faith to propel us in directions that are truly liberating for human souls and human peoples?”¹⁷

Even though membership in mainline churches seems to be on the decline and the number of people identifying as “nones” is growing, those people who claim to be spiritual is rising. The number of people who are looking for something through self-help books, meditation and yoga is on the rise. This puts Unitarian Universalism in a unique position. As Christine Robinson, one of the ministers in the article asks, “If we don’t serve their needs for depth, heart, spirituality, hope, faith, and love outside of an orthodox setting, who will?”

¹⁷ “Faith in Our Future,” *UUWorld*, Winter 2011, 25.

Two influential and important (non-Unitarian Universalist) theologians describe Unitarian Universalism as truly relevant for the 21st century. Rev. Dr. Kay Northcutt, a minister in Tulsa, Ok, said:

You are lifesavers. You are mosaic makers called to put together broken bit by bit—creating patterns of beauty and meaning out of pain and loss. You are bone carriers, like the Israelites, who lifted the bones of their ancestors and took them out across the desert. Bones are heavy things, but what you inherit from those who come before is rich, so make sure you carry them with you. You are the hope of the world.¹⁸

Diana Eck, the Harvard Divinity School Professor and Scholar said at the Installation of Galen Guengerich a couple of years ago:

If there ever were a time that we need to spin out a new fabric of belonging and a wider sense of “we” for the human community, it is certainly now....Developing a consciousness of our growing religious inter-relatedness, developing a moral compass that will give us guidance in the years ahead—these are certainly among the most important tasks of our time...you have a theological orientation toward the oneness and mystery of God that is essential for the world of religious difference in which we live...You are, in my estimation, the church of the new millennium. In this era, Unitarian Universalism is not the lowest common denominator, but the highest common calling...In a world divided by race and by religion and ideology, the very presence of a church like this, committed to the oneness of God, the love of God, the love of neighbor and service to humanity is a beacon. The Unitarian theology, and yes you have one, does not reduce the mystery of the divine, the transcendent, but amplifies it, broadens it to include the investigation of the many, many ways in which the divine is known and yet unknown...You do have a mission. The world is in need of your theology.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Blogsme, <http://infidelity.blogsme.com/2010/09/29/diana-eck-on-unitarian-universalism/> (accessed Month 9, 2009)

In order to survive as a religion, as a great faith, with all the potential and possibility that are in these great words from these women of different faiths, there are some things we need to address. There are numerous things we can do to be the faith of the twenty-first century but this project proposes to address just one, otherwise the project would be too big (a cathedral rather than a stone) and, perhaps, never ending.

Unitarian Universalism has no theological creed or dogma. Our congregations consist of a diverse group of people with a wide ranging set of beliefs when it comes to questions of a theological nature. We are a community of congregations in covenant with each other to affirm and promote our Unitarian Universalists principles. But these principles cannot substitute for a theology. Traditional theological belief (Is there one God? Is there one sacred scripture?) need not be the binding force in a congregation of the 21st century. What is required and possible in a modern church is a wider, more expansive theological discussion (What is my purpose? To whom do I belong? How shall we be towards each other and the earth?). These other kinds of conversations lead to a discussion of what then are the other things that bind us together as an association of congregations? How do we identify these and integrate them into the Unitarian Universalist identity?

If we cannot understand how we develop a Unitarian Universalist identity that is also the connecting fiber from Unitarian to Unitarian we risk declining in membership and becoming obsolete in a world where religion is on a slow but steady descent into irrelevance. We must embrace our congregations as places where God's love is universal, as places where the deepest needs of the spirit can be met and where community means service to all of humanity.

Two major ways identity is determined and integrated is through story and song. Stories and songs play a powerful role in determining or shaping who we are, what we value, where we come from, what we dream and hope for in the future. They connect us to our past and help us determine our future. They explain things and help us understand.

This project is an educational tool that will identify the main areas of Unitarian Universalist identity that may be spoken or not that binds one to the other. These identity factors will be translated into story and song in a book that can be used in worship and/or in religious education settings.

Through this project and the product that it produces I hope to help Unitarian Universalists claim a wider identity than, say, just the principles or “a church with no creed.” Further, my goal is to widen and expand the conversation so that the understanding of what it means to be Unitarian Universalist goes deeper than the principles but also produces a modern theology that is expansive and inclusive for all those seekers out there, a theology that helps Unitarian Universalism be a church for the new millennium. A theological framework that would help Unitarian Universalists claim their identity and answer the questions Rev. Larry Peers so presciently asked: How big is our faith to hold and heal ourselves, to grapple with the emerging twenty-first century? How big is our faith to propel us in directions that are truly liberating for human souls and human peoples?”²⁰

²⁰ Christopher L. Walton, “Faith in Our Future,” *UUWorld*, Winter 2011, 25.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTION: THEOLOGICAL

Theological

Is there a need for a unifying theology for Unitarian Universalism in the 21st century?

Unitarian Universalists do not have a set creed or dogma. We have seven principles that all congregations covenant to affirm and promote. Our congregations are very diverse when it comes to theology with a wide range of beliefs from a belief in God to atheism and nearly everything (it seems) in between. Yet, like with many protestant denominations, are numbers are in decline. One aim of this project is to determine if there is an overarching theology that binds us together in a way that the seven principles do and will this theology help us be the religion for a new millennium.

A Brief Theological History: Unitarianism

Unitarian Universalism is the product of the merger in 1961 of two similar but also vastly different denominations, the Unitarians and the Universalists.

The founding theological framework of the original Unitarians, dating as far back as Arius in the fourth century, is that God is a unity and not a trinity. These early Christians, for they were followers of Jesus, believed that God had a single aspect and could not be divided into the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. As long as there has been a theology of the trinity there has also existed this counter idea of a unity.

In the fourth century there was wide discussion throughout the Roman Empire about the nature of God and Jesus with no clear consensus. Eventually, two major theological positions emerged and dominated with camps forming around each one. One was that of Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria in Egypt and the other was of one of his priests, Arius. Alexander proposed that Jesus, as the son of God, was always divine and so therefore was of the same substance or essential nature of God. Arius disagreed and countered with the idea that Jesus' essential nature lay somewhere between divine and human.²¹ The matter was declared resolved with the creation of the Athanasian creed at the council of Nicea in 325 CE (at a later council in 381 CE, this creed was revised and then called the Nicene Creed).²²

Several historians, including Earl Morse Wilbur and Charles Howe, mention that perhaps this anti-Trinitarian position should not be the major defining characteristic of early Unitarian theology although the name adopted for this movement would suggest it to be so. Instead, Wilbur suggests that three non-theological principles of Unitarianism might define this faith more accurately. These are: freedom of religious thought, the reliance and commitment to reason, and tolerance of different viewpoints and practices.²³

Leaving the fourth century and moving into the period of the Reformation it is primarily these principles that defined the anti-Trinitarian liberal church of the era. There are several notable characters from this time period that should be mentioned. Michael

²¹ Charles A Howe, *For Faith and Freedom: A Short History of Unitarianism in Europe*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1997, 4.

²² Ibid, 5.

²³ Ibid, 5.

Servetus, who's burning at the stake for his heretical anti-Trinitarian views by Calvin led to a movement of religious toleration. Faustus Socinus who insisted that reason should be applied to scripture and church dogma, and Francis David, a cleric in the court of King Sigismund of Transylvania, the only Unitarian king in European history. King Sigismund declared the first religious edict on religious toleration in 1568 was influenced by David, who believed in a rational interpretation of scripture, God's unity and the humanity of Jesus.²⁴ For David, God was "a loving father from whom everything comes" and not an "abstract formulation."²⁵

Two centuries later the first organized Unitarian congregation gathered for worship in England although, certainly, the idea of Unitarianism was not entirely new.

Charles Howe writes,

As elsewhere in Europe, the widespread availability of the Bible, which first took place during the sixteenth century, and the subsequent great diversity of interpretations, made such views almost inevitable. Earl Morse Wilbur has commented, the 'independent study of the Bible must be regarded as the most fundamental of all the influences that combined in shaping the Unitarian movement.'²⁶

While Unitarianism was taking root in England it was also doing the same across the ocean in America. By the early 1800's, though, liberal Christianity was a green shoot ready to grow on a trajectory of its own. At this time, the theology of the congregational churches was Calvinistic in nature, immersed in the doctrine of original sin and the depravity of humanity and a belief in a wrathful God.

²⁴ Ibid, 108.

²⁵ Ibid, 108.

²⁶ Ibid, 134.

In 1819, William Ellery Channing, in a sermon at the ordination of Jared Sparks, declared liberal Christians “Unitarians,” giving legitimacy to what once was considered a derogatory word in liberal Christian circles. In the sermon he declared the theological stance of these Unitarians:

- Human reason must be used to properly interpret Scripture.
- God is a Unity, not a Trinity, and Trinitarianism cannot be supported by either Scripture or reason.
- Jesus Christ is also a Unity, not having two natures, “one human and the other divine,” but one nature.
- Jesus is not God but was used by God as a mediator with humanity.
- God represents infinite goodness, justice, and mercy, and the Calvinist view of a vengeful God dishonors God’s nature. God’s true nature shows love.²⁷

By the mid-1800’s, Transcendentalist thought, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, was edging into “mainstream” Unitarianism. In Emerson’s Harvard Divinity School Address of 1838 he wrote of two major themes with equal amounts of intellect and passion.

The first was theological and explained his thinking on Transcendentalism. In this address to the graduating students, who would soon be serving as ministers, he suggested that the importance of Jesus lay not in the miracles in which most Christians and Unitarians believed, but in the faith Jesus taught. He went further to suggest that this faith was available to every person through nature. One did not need the mediator of Jesus to commune with God. One merely need to take a walk in the woods, or take a breath of air, or notice the grass, the flowers, or the smell of fresh cut hay.

The second subject underlines the first. The young ministers to whom he addressed his talk were not called to preach an old, decaying religion. Emerson’s talk

²⁷ Bruce Clear, “Three Prophets Of Unitarianism: In Their Own Words,” a sermon delivered May 4, 2008.

was a “reminder that the life of religion must be recreated in the souls of each successive generation, and a declaration that it is the responsibility of the minister to ‘acquaint men at first hand with the Deity.’”²⁸ Furthermore, the preacher must not rely on old texts and a “wasting unbelief” but must uplift listeners with the experience of a life well lived. It is the experiences of life- the grief and joy and beauty of living that feed the sermon. “The True preacher can be known by this,” he wrote, “that he deals out to the people his life, -- life passed through the fire of thought.”²⁹

It is in this sentiment that we can discern the importance of Emerson to the Unitarian movement. Emerson asks us not to be distracted by the form of religion or the mediator of faith, but to look into our own hearts and discover who we are called to be in the world.

A third “prophet” in the theological development of early Unitarianism in America was Theodore Parker. In his sermon, *The Transient and Permanent in Christianity* he suggests that “Christianity could not be validated by miracles or by scriptural witnesses or even by the authority of Jesus. Rather, he suggested that if Christianity is true, its truth must be axiomatic and self-evident, and would be just as true if Jesus never existed, or if the message had been proclaimed in Athens rather than in Palestine.”³⁰

Each of these, Channing, Emerson and Parker, created paradigm shifts in the theology of American Unitarianism. Yet, these shifts were not over. One more major shift

²⁸ Conrad Edick Wright, *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing, Emerson, Parker*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1986.

²⁹ Ibid, p40.

³⁰ David E. Bumbaugh, *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History*. Chicago: Meadville Lombard Press, 2001.

would occur in the early twentieth century with the humanist controversy which would result in a Unitarianism far afield from its original theological foundations.

The humanists shifted the concern of religion from God to a concern for humanity. In 1933, humanists in Chicago issued the Humanist Manifesto which tried to clearly define the beliefs and convictions of the humanists. The Manifesto “defined the universe as self-existing, not the work of a creator, saw man as part of nature, rejected revelation as a basis for religion, affirmed science as the basis of all knowledge of the universe and declared theism of any kind to be outdated.”³¹ The influence of the humanist position has had a tremendous impact on modern Unitarian Universalism, so much so that a huge number of UUs would call themselves humanist. The term humanist needs further refining, however, which will be considered a bit later in this chapter.

A Brief Theological History: Universalism

The theological idea of universal salvation was an early one on the American landscape. Universalists were also Christians, as the Unitarians originally were, and continued to maintain a Trinitarian theology. However, their theology as well as their name came from the belief in universal salvation. Universal salvation means that eventually all people are reconciled with God. There were none who were predestined to salvation or to damnation- all would be saved by God’s love and grace.

In 1741, George de Benneville came to America from Europe to escape persecution for his Universalist beliefs. He settled in the Philadelphia area which happened to have a large population of folks who all held the same conviction: God was a

³¹ Ibid, 138.

loving God who would not damn his creation to eternal hell.³² John Murray, known as the father of Universalism for his prodigious preaching and endless work to spread the good news of universal salvation, also came to America to save his neck in 1770. Because of the popularity, and perhaps comfort, of this theology, it quickly grew and became quite wide spread.

From these early beginnings until today there are at least two things important to mention about Universalism. The first is that over the years universal salvation became a more mainstream theological belief adopted by many faith denominations resulting in the issue of universal salvation becoming less of a central concern. While still controversial in some mainline denominations, the idea that God loves all of creation was not as controversial as it once was. So, while at first Universalism grew and became quite large, with time and integration of universal salvation into these mainline denominations, Universalist churches decreased dramatically.

The second is that the belief in universal salvation and the belief in a loving God had ramifications here on earth as well. If all of God's children would be reconciled with God upon death, why not a kind of reconciliation while they still lived? This thinking led to an embrace of the social gospel and an involvement in sundry social justice issues that elevated the living conditions of all people particularly in the building of settlement homes, prison reform, mental health, education, temperance, women's rights and more.

The Unitarians and the Universalists merged in 1961. The process that led to the merger focused more on combining two institutions rather than bringing together two

³² Charles A. Howe, *The Larger Faith: A Short History of American Universalism*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1993.

religious movements. In the Commission on Appraisal's report called *Engaging our theological Diversity* they write:

We took two religious movements, each with clear and distinct historical roots and at least some clear and distinct theological assumptions (such as the oneness of God, the goodness of God, the universality of salvation) and merged them organizationally without attempting to sort through the theological issues. In fact, we seem to have dealt with the thorny issue of potential theological disharmony by essentially banning all theology from the newly formed movement!³³

It is clear that today, in 2014, we still are seeking a theological understanding of ourselves that considers our roots as well as considers the shifts in theological perspective since the merger. This quandary is clearly recognized since the Commission on Appraisal chose that as their three year study and reported on it in 2005 in their *Engaging our Theological Diversity* report. They have continued with this theological path when they suggested the principles be revised in their 2009 report, which was voted down at the General Assembly that year. So,

Where is Unitarian Universalism now?

Today, Unitarian Universalists might start at a different place to describe our theology. That is, considering the nature of God and Jesus or whether or not there is universal salvation would not be a natural starting point for a modern discussion of Unitarian Universalist theology.

The theological diversity in our congregations is on a wide spectrum and ranges from a traditional Christian view to one of pantheism (the belief that God is everywhere; that there exists nothing which is outside of God) to one of humanism to an Atheistic one

³³ "Engaging our Theological Diversity" *Commission on Appraisal* (2005). Boston, MA, 20.

and as such this may not be the place to begin a discussion of Unitarian Universalist theology either. It is clear from the theological diversity in our congregations that Unitarian Universalism has no theological creed or dogma, no set doctrine but it is also clear that one really can't "believe anything one wants" since the community serves to weed out extreme points of view. Amidst our immense theological diversity we do share some commonalities that could serve as a starting point for where Unitarian Universalism is today.

While we do not have one common theology or one set of scriptures or one doctrine of faith, Unitarian Universalists do have the world to draw on for what we call our "living tradition." We describe these as sources of our faith and they are:

- *Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;*
- *Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;*
- *Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;*
- *Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;*
- *Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;*
- *Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.*

These sources are not a common Unitarian Universalist theology and in no way should they ever be considered as such. Ideally one source does not rise above another either; however, it is up to the individual and the congregation to determine which sources most speak to them. The sources are there to serve as a boundless resource for how we worship

and practice our faith. They serve to stretch us as well and push us to be ever inclusive of a diverse theological perspective.

Something else Unitarian Universalists hold in common is our seven principles.

As a community of congregations we are in covenant with each other to affirm and promote these principles which are:

- *The inherent worth and dignity of every person;*
- *Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;*
- *Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;*
- *A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;*
- *The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;*
- *The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;*
- *Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.*

For some, our principles are all about who we are. For others, the principles clearly guide or instruct a way of being but they do not represent a deeper theology. For still others, the principles are a distraction from the “real” Unitarian Universalism.” It should also be noted that many of these principles are also found in other denominations, namely the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists.

After a process of discernment led by the Commission on Appraisal about the principles took place about six years ago, several ministers began describing themselves, theologically, as “first and seventh principle” preachers. In his sermon at General Assembly in 2012, the Rev. John Crestwell from Annapolis, MD said that “I’m a first and seventh principle preacher, which means that my faith calls me to fight to participate in the game. This struggle is too important and too many lives are at stake. When I think about the worth and dignity of all in the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part, I cannot see another’s woe and not be in sorrow too. I cannot see another’s

grief and not seek for kind relief. I cannot see a falling tear and not feel my sorrow's share.”

Other ministers and lay people heard John’s words and they responded, too. Rev. James Ishmael Ford from Providence, RI wrote: “I heard those words (that John proclaimed) and I heard my own heart, and my voice and my life. I heard our message, our good news...” He continues:

First is our proclamation of the preciousness of the human being, of each and every one of us, as we are. You are good enough. You contain within you all that is necessary to love and grow deep and to heal your own wounds and the wounds of the world. This is articulated as the First Principle of our contemporary Unitarian Universalism: *We affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person.*

And the Seventh Principle grounds it and radicalizes it by proclaiming that this is so because we are all of us, each and every precious one of us—and every blessed other thing in this cosmos—united in a web of intimacy that is more deeply true than the blood coursing through our veins. This is the Seventh Principle of our contemporary Unitarian Universalism: *We affirm and promote the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.*

There is one thing more. We are about the integration of these two truths as deeply known and explored, manifest as a way of life.³⁴

Crestwell and Ford have found meaning and purpose in the first and seventh principles. These, they say, are the two truths of our faith. More and more it is these two principles that are rising above the others and taking form as a theology for modern Unitarian Universalism. I will say more about this in a bit.

Even as these two principles move into a what might be described as a theological position in our contemporary faith, Unitarian Universalism as a whole still bumps up against the equally true description such as the one from William Schulz, former

³⁴ James Ishmael Ford, “Unitarian Universalism’s Two Truths,” *UU World* December 31, 2012, <http://www.uuworld.org/spirit/articles/281648.shtml> (accessed Month 9, 2099)

president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, who describes Unitarian

Universalism in this way:

...ours is a creedless faith and respect for others' beliefs is of high value. We do not require our members to subscribe to a particular theology or set of affirmations in order to join our congregations. Instead, we encourage individuals to garner insights from all the world's great faiths, as well as from Shakespeare and from science, from feminism and from feelings. We invite people to explore their spirituality in a responsible way. We ask Unitarian Universalist to cherish the earth, to free the oppressed, and to be grateful for life's blessings. Out of this combination of reflection and experience, *each one of us shapes a personal faith. For Unitarian Universalists the individual is the ultimate source of religious authority.*³⁵

Schultz goes on to say that our individual beliefs are “tempered by conversation with our tradition and tested within the crucible of our community.”³⁶ (*italics are mine*).

This statement by William Schulz leads to a broad assessment of, first, the positive perspectives in Unitarian Universalism that might make it the faith for the twenty-first century and second, the challenges in this faith that could actually prevent Unitarian Universalism from being “a religion for our times.”

Two influential and important theologians describe Unitarian Universalism as truly relevant for the 21st century. Rev. Dr. Kay Northcutt, a minister in Tulsa, Ok, said:

You are lifesavers. You are mosaic makers called to put together broken bit by bit—creating patterns of beauty and meaning out of pain and loss. You are bone carriers, like the Israelites, who lifted the bones of their ancestors and took them out across the desert. Bones are heavy things, but what you inherit from those who come before is rich, so make sure you carry them with you. You are the hope of the world.³⁷

³⁵ Peter Morales, ed., *Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*. 4th ed. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004, 2.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

³⁷ Christopher L. Walton, “Faith in Our Future,” *UUWorld*, Winter 2011, 25.

Diana Eck, the Harvard Divinity School Professor and Scholar said at the Installation of Galen Guengerich at All Souls in New York City said a couple of years ago:

If there ever were a time that we need to spin out a new fabric of belonging and a wider sense of “we” for the human community, it is certainly now.... Developing a consciousness of our growing religious inter-relatedness, developing a moral compass that will give us guidance in the years ahead—these are certainly among the most important tasks of our time...you have a theological orientation toward the oneness and mystery of God that is essential for the world of religious difference in which we live... You are, in my estimation, the church of the new millennium. In this era, Unitarian Universalism is not the lowest common denominator, but the highest common calling... In a world divided by race and by religion and ideology, the very presence of a church like this, committed to the oneness of God, the love of God, the love of neighbor and service to humanity is a beacon. The Unitarian theology, and yes you have one, does not reduce the mystery of the divine, the transcendent, but amplifies it, broadens it to include the investigation of the many, many ways in which the divine is known and yet unknown... You do have a mission. The world is in need of your theology.³⁸

These two statements speak to our strengths as a religious faith tradition. First, our founding theological stance that ultimately all people are reconciled with God has grown into a radical inclusiveness that declares that God loves us all- even the poor, even those without a voice, even those who are gay or lesbian, even those who live and worship differently than we do.

Second, this radical inclusivity leads us to pro-actively work for diversity in our congregations. While we still are predominately a white denomination, we continuously strive through programs, ministry, education, partnerships and social justice activities to have our congregations represent the world in which we live. We know so much of the

³⁸ Blogsme, <http://infidelity.blogsme.com/2010/09/29/diana-eck-on-unitarian-universalism/> (accessed Month 9, 2009)

world is divided over race and religion, ideology and politics but in our congregations we lean into the possibility of radical hospitality, peace and justice for all.

Third, the seventh principle, *the respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*, has risen above simply being a value or a principle we all share to a theological position. This leads us to create ecological ministries that address such things as climate change, animal extinction, food ethics and more. Our “green sanctuary” movement lifts up this seventh principle and encourages all of us to live consciously and conscientiously towards each other and towards all of creation. Most importantly this principle removes the individual as the primary concern and moves into the center the interdependent web of existence of which the individual is only a small part.

And fourth, all of these factors: our inclusivity and diversity and radical hospitality; our belief in the first principle that each person has inherent worth and dignity (stemming from God’s love for us all); our embrace of the interconnection of the web of all creation that leads us to work to make the world better place through social justice. Throughout our history, social justice work has played an important role in the way our faith is lived out in the world. We believe that our faith calls us to make a heaven here on earth.

Contemporary Unitarian Universalism has some strengths that position it to be the faith of the 21st century. There is a longing in the world to be included and loved. There is a deep desire to transcend the solipsistic individualism of our modern culture through the knowledge, and experience, that we are but one strand in the great interconnected web of existence. Too many people in this world are crying out for healing and wholeness,

justice, and a chance to participate in as well as give back to this hurting world. We are the answer to these needs, and yet, Unitarian Universalism also has some challenges.

In his introduction to the Minns Lectures in 2011, Rev. Larry Peers lays the groundwork for this discussion by asking “how big is our faith?” and then suggests that the vast overwhelming number of folks who consider joining a Unitarian Universalist congregation might not because they understand our faith means: be on your own, believe whatever you want to believe, don’t be religious for God’s sake, question and never feel any compulsion to find.³⁹

This is to say that our challenges are about faith and theology and the role of organized religion in our lives. In *Engaging our Theological Diversity*, the Commission on Appraisal reported that “such ambiguity and concomitant tentativeness in articulating what UU’s are about religiously may be our greatest liability and the greatest obstacle to achieving our potential as an empowering and liberating faith for the twenty-first century.”⁴⁰ Let’s explore these challenges a little more in depth.

Faith and Theology

What I will use to frame the challenges in this section is a statement Marilyn Sewell made in her paper delivered at the Minns Lecture in 2011. She wrote that the core problem for Unitarian Universalism is that “we are a religious movement that no longer

³⁹ Larry Peers, “Composing our Unitarian Universalist Future: Where are We Now?” *Minns Lecture* (2011), 5.

⁴⁰ “Engaging our Theological Diversity” *Commission on Appraisal* (2005). Boston, MA, 138.

takes religion seriously.”⁴¹ Yet, there is much in both sections that overlap with one another.

One challenge is in the very essence of Unitarian Universalism that believes at the core that, as William Schulz expressed earlier, *each one of us shapes a personal faith. For Unitarian Universalists the individual is the ultimate source of religious authority.* This places the individual as the ultimate source of religious authority in a way that might limit a connection to something beyond one’s self. This is a challenge for us in several ways and shows up as an undertone in all the challenges Unitarian Universalism faces.

The connection to something larger, be it God or Love or the Spirit or the Great Mystery or the Universe, allows the individual to move beyond their own ego, beyond their own needs and wants and expectations to serve a greater purpose. With our theological diversity, or some might call it a theological fragmentation, it can be a challenge or even a stalemate position to get to that which is beyond ourselves. Too often the focus is on the individual and that limits the nurturing, healing, meaning-making and services that are possible.

The individual as the ultimate source of authority is reflected in the community when what is of ultimate concern is whether or not the individual was intellectually stimulated or whether someone likes the prayer or whether they even like the minister. The religious community is second to what the individual wants so that our congregations serve as a marketplace for consumers rather than a center for spiritual awakening for seekers.

⁴¹ Marilyn Sewell, “Unitarian Universalists: Who are we? What do we Aspire to Be?” *Minns Lecture*, 2011, 4.

Another challenge is that there is a tremendous theological hold that “old school” humanism has on our congregations. These humanists, who would describe themselves as secular humanists or atheists, take issue with our congregations as religious, with any program or ministry that hints at spirituality, and any use of religious language whatsoever. While some congregations have been able to overcome this hypersensitivity by the humanists, many of the smaller congregations have not. The problem with this is people coming into our congregations are longing for some engagement with religion and purpose that is beyond the self but they are cut off as soon as they walk through the door by such comments as “we don’t say that word here” or “leave your spirituality at home.” Another problem is this old school humanism, which is about cutting out God, is not necessarily the humanism of a broader understanding which might be better defined as knowing the goodness and possibility of humanity in the context of something beyond ourselves. This old humanism needs to die or move out of our congregations if we are to survive or even thrive into this new century. I will talk more about this new humanism at the end of this chapter.

Yet another challenge is the idolization of reason, intellectualism, and science. All of these are important and worthy endeavors and should not be ignored in a Unitarian Universalist congregation but nor should they edge out of our congregations wonder and mystery or the knowledge that comes from emotions and intuition. To paraphrase Earl Morse Wilbur here, reason, intellectualism and science are not the final goals to be aimed at in religion but only some conditions in which the true ends in religion can be attained.

One last challenge I would like to mention is that I believe we need more good ole religion in our congregations. We need spirit and prayer. We need blessings and grace.

We need forgiveness and redemption. We need recognition and resurrection. We need to know what we set apart as holy and sacred. We need to know we are a religion. We need to know about faith.

Role of Organized Religion

Again many of the challenges in this section have roots and/or connections to those things I mentioned in the section above on faith and theology. I think it is important to note that although I tried to separate out theological issues from organizational issues they are intricately connected.

I often joke that Unitarian Universalists have no respect or trust for authority because if you can toss out a belief in God, you are empowered to become your own authority. This is reflected in varying levels of trust and respect for the minister as well as turning any power over to the minister. It is displayed in the constant questioning of leadership and staff. It even shows up in the way we practice the democratic process in our congregations and in the greater Unitarian Universalist Association. What I mean is that so often we expect every single voice to be heard rather than giving respect and authority to those who through elections have been chosen to represent these same voices. It also limits action and decision making because people are afraid to take on leadership positions because then they would be the authority!

Another challenge is the austere manner in which we support our congregations. While other members of mainline congregations tithe 10% of their income to the church, we do not ask our members to tithe. We often do not even suggest a minimum contribution, needless to say then, that the financial giving is often poor to embarrassing,

maybe less than 1 ½ %. While Unitarian Universalists challenge miracles with science and reason they also somehow expect the church to survive on a miracle and prayer. Colleagues have noticed a growing republican approach to budgets, too, in that rather than reaching deeper into their pockets to fund the ministry of the congregation they prefer to cut budgets so that ministry becomes limited, cut, or impossible. We underfund our churches and the Unitarian Universalist Association and therefore disempower leadership and ministry.

I have already mentioned individualism in the context of theology but it is also exists in the organization of our congregations. This occurs in two ways. Rather than seeing ourselves as a religious community we gather together as a group of individuals with many ideas, needs and wants. There is some expectation that the community is there to serve the need of the individual rather than the individuals serving the need of the gathered religious community. More dangerous is to “honor” every person (everyone has inherent worth and dignity) so that we have chronic cases of the “tyranny of the minority” or worse, unhealthy people for whom we refuse to set boundaries when they cause damage to the community.

Yet another challenge is our pride or lack of humility. Marilyn Sewell describes it best. She writes, “Unitarian Universalists are likely to be characterized by strong egos battling against one another and against any form of authority, rather than by a people who know they need to be blessed. We are proud and elitist, rather than humble; we believe ourselves to be self-sufficient, smarter than the average bear, rather than in need of grace; we tend to be satirical rather than ironic, readily making fun of others, whom we consider inferior; many of our churches and fellowships believe that we have “outgrown”

the superstition of our Christian forebears and are on to better things, like eco-roofs or communion services done with donuts or M&M's.⁴²

Finally, while I may not have exhausted all the challenges that Unitarian Universalism faces, at least one last challenge should be mentioned. The commitment level in our congregations is very low. This is reflected not only in the financial contributions people make but also in Sunday morning attendance, volunteerism, and the ability to stick with it when unhappy, disturbed or angry. Most Unitarian Universalists congregations ask little in terms of membership and little is what they get.

Unitarian Universalism in the Context of the Greater American Culture

Before we get to the last section of this chapter, I think it is important to put Unitarian Universalism in the context of the American religious landscape including a brief look at American culture itself.

Robert Bellah, the American sociologist who specialized in the sociology of religion, presented a series of lectures at General Assembly in June of 1998. His words are relevant today and important to the topic at hand. In his lecture he describes Unitarian Universalism as a religion of strong dissenters when it comes to social witness but religiously and culturally we are mainstream, actually right at the American center. What he meant was that in America the majority of religions are considered dissenting religions. There is no established church in America.⁴³

⁴² Ibid, 6.

⁴³ Robert Bella, "Unitarian Universalism in Societal Perspective," *Lecture Series at General Assembly* (1998), Rochester, NY, 2.

In this dissenting milieu, Unitarian Universalists are part of the mainstream and so, one of our core beliefs, that the individual conscience matters in religion, is actually shared by a majority of Americans. A Gallop poll conducted around that time reported that 80 % of Americans agreed that “an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches and synagogues.”⁴⁴ To say it another way, one of the most fundamental tenets in American culture is the sacredness of individual conscience and this happens to be a sacred truth in Unitarian Universalism as well.

This individualism affects our understanding of differences as well. The openness and acceptance to difference that Unitarian Universalists affirm returns back to the individual such that we might say “we are all different, we are all unique, respect that,” again, a sentiment not uncommon in American culture.⁴⁵

This individualism also affects our institutions. Robert Bellah writes that “Neither among UUs nor among other Americans has institutionalism ever had an easy time, or even a good name...And yet, without good institutions there will not be good communities and without good communities there will not be good individuals.”⁴⁶ There is obviously a theme developing here and that is that some of the fundamental challenges of Unitarian Universalism are indeed the same fundamental challenges in American culture.

Bellah goes on further to tie the sacredness of the individual with economic individualism. What is lost with the two is a sense of solidarity, a realization of a deeper

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid, 5.

connection. What is lost is the idea that we are in this together and that people need each other. As a result, poverty is at its highest level since the early twentieth century, most of the money and power is in the hands of the 1% and the fabric of the welfare state is weak and fraying. Understanding this is critical in developing a Unitarian Universalist theology of the 21st century.

Robert Bellah put Unitarian Universalism in mainstream American culture based on the centrality both have for the individual. In 1970, Robin M. Williams created a list of ten core values that he suggests define the American character. This list could just as well define a Unitarian Universalist. While not every core value describes every American or every Unitarian Universalist, and in fact some of the values contradict each other, they do point to this lack of boundary between the Unitarian Universalist religion and secular America. I think this is another issue to address if we are to become the “religion for our time.” Why go to Unitarian Universalist church if the secular world is much like what you might find at that church?

Robin M. Williams core values are:

1. *Individualism.* People are responsible for their own success or failure. Individual ability and hard work are the keys to success.
2. *Achievement and success.* Personal achievement results from successful competition with others.
3. *Activity and work.* People who are industrious are praised for their achievement; those perceived as lazy are ridiculed.
4. *Science and technology.* People in the United States have a great deal of faith in science and technology.

5. *Progress and material comfort.* The material comforts of life include not only basic necessities but also the goods and services that make life easier and more pleasant.
6. *Efficiency and practicality.* People want things to be bigger, better, faster.
7. *Equality.* Overt class distinctions are rejected. However, equality has been defined as “equality of opportunity-” an assumed equal chance to achieve success- not as “equality of outcome.”
8. *Morality and humanitarianism.* Aiding others, especially following natural disasters, is seen as a value.
9. *Freedom and liberty.* Individual freedom is highly valued. The idea of freedom includes the right to private enterprise, freedom of the press, and other freedoms that are considered to be “basic” rights.
10. *Racism and solidarity.* People value their own racial or ethnic group above all others. Such feelings of superiority may lead to discrimination. Many people also believe in the superiority of their country and that “the American way of life” is best.⁴⁷

These permeable edges between the Unitarian Universalist religion and American culture might suggest why the numbers in our congregations are so low. The above challenges mentioned earlier also give reason to a small denomination with official numbers ranging in the 200,000’s. But there is one other important factor to mention and that is the general commitment to organized religion in modern America.

In October of 2012, the Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project released their report on the shifting numbers in American religious life. They reported

⁴⁷ Diana Kendall, “Chapter 2: Culture,” *Sociology in our Times* (2007): 51.

that the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion is increasing at a rapid pace, almost 33 million or 14%. They reported that 1/5 of the U.S public is religiously unaffiliated. Pew research indicates that “in the last five years alone, the unaffiliated have increased from just over 15% to just under 20% of all U.S. adults. Their ranks now include more than 13 million self-described atheists and agnostics (nearly 6% of the U.S. public).”⁴⁸ Interestingly, many of the country’s unaffiliated adults describe themselves as religious or spiritual in some way and “two-thirds of them say they believe in God (68%). More than half say they often feel a deep connection with nature and the earth (58%), while more than a third classify themselves as “spiritual” but not “religious” (37%), and one-in-five (21%) say they pray every day. In addition, most religiously unaffiliated Americans think that churches and other religious institutions benefit society by strengthening community bonds and aiding the poor. With few exceptions, though, the unaffiliated say they are not looking for a religion that would be right for them. Overwhelmingly, they think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules and too involved in politics.”⁴⁹

In American society, commitment to religious organizations is shifting even while people still describe themselves as believing in god or being spiritual or praying daily. So this takes us to the question towards which we were moving along:

⁴⁸ “Nones on the Rise,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/> (2012) (accessed Month 9, 2099)

⁴⁹Ibid

Is there a need for a unifying theology for Unitarian Universalism in the 21st century?

I believe if Unitarian Universalism is to survive into the future and even show growth in numbers, depth, and influence then, yes, there is need for a unifying theology. We will also need to address head on some of the challenges and issues that I have brought up earlier in this chapter. Finally, we will need to encourage a Unitarian Universalist identity that clearly defines who Unitarian Universalists are as separate from secular American culture. My project endeavors to be a beginning for that identity development.⁵⁰

This dissertation is but a small part in a larger inquiry into the future of Unitarian Universalism. As I close this chapter, I will draw on a bit of the thinking from just a few other sources.

The Commission on Appraisal had several recommendations at the end of their report, *Engaging our Theological Diversity*, that are worth considering here. These take up a full chapter in their report but I will just mention a few of them here: focus on theology, encourage theological diversity, promote spiritual practices, develop worship resources, make peace with our religious past, affirm theological diversity among ministers, and foster theology in religious education.⁵¹ As one can see, there is tremendous focus, and hope, in the area of theology. The Commission on Appraisal calls for an affirmation of theological diversity among ministers and in our congregations, yet

⁵⁰ See www.ourstoriesandsongs.com

⁵¹ “Engaging our Theological Diversity”, *Commission on Appraisal* (2005). Boston, MA, 135-152.

even with this, I think it is possible to have a unifying theology that still gives the individual a certain level of religious authority.

The unifying theology of our future will not be the humanism from our past. This secular, godless humanism needs to die in our congregations. If it is to live it needs to do so outside of a religious institution, outside of the Unitarian Universalist religion. But there is a humanism for our future that the Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson-Doyle spells out in his Minns Lecture of 2011. In brief he says the humanism of the future will be ecological, spiritual, ethical, scientific, and universal. He concludes with these words:

When humanism does these things – and it can – then I think it can reclaim or discover enough diffidence, enough power, to stand before the raging stoic grandmothers with integrity. If humanism sings and dances, if it moves us to celebrate our bodies and to put them on the line for the sake of other human beings, if humanism inspires confidence, curiosity and creativity, if it moves us to make the world better, and reminds us that we can do so, if humanism opens its heart and its mind, well, then, I hope that humanism will continue to shape our faith and our lives for the century to come.⁵²

Neither the humanism of the *Humanist Manifesto* nor the humanism of the secular or atheistic humanists is the future of Unitarian Universalism. Humanism must be understood in a new way that leaves room open for God and the goodness, possibility and hope of humanity. It is this kind of humanism that will have a role in creating the theology for a Unitarian Universalist future.

The current theological shift that is occurring with two of the Unitarian Universalist principles also shows promise for Unitarian Universalism. While all the principles have value, it is the first and seventh that most powerfully encompass a theology for the 21st century. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues and if it can click with ministers and congregations throughout the UUA.

⁵² Matthew Johnson-Doyle, “Walking More Humbly- And Thriving” *Minns Lecture* (2012), 6.

But it was at the General Assembly in 2013 that I finally heard what my heart longed for, something that so many people are looking for in a religion for the 21st century. It is nothing new, perhaps, but something brought together in a new and clear way. In her sermon at the Service of the Living Tradition, which celebrates the ministry of Unitarian Universalism, the Rev. Vanessa Southern brought Unitarian Universalist theology into the modern era. She said “generation after generation we take two truths as our own, and these two give the living tradition its continuity...” She continued:

Emerson told us not to take any second hand truths, but generation after generation we take two truths as our own, and these two give the living tradition its continuity. First, is a commitment to a Love that refuses to honor false and constructed boundaries between us. This is the love that banished hell from religious imagination, then put us to work banishing it everywhere else. The expanse of this Love’s embrace will, in the end, be the best judge of the worth of our living.

Second, and related, is the Unity we affirm beyond all divisions real or imagined. Interdependent web of all existence, injustice anywhere as a threat to justice everywhere, all creation woven into one garment of destiny. Ecologically, theologically, politically, economically, this is the reality we seek not to forget. That we are one. Remembering it breaks us wide open generation after generation to both deep pain and great joy and wisdom. Love and Unity. These are our enduring mission.⁵³

Love and Unity. Here is the unifying theology for Unitarian Universalism in the 21st century.

And a few closing words by Elizabeth Tarbox:

I say ours is a story of faith and hope and love. I say it is our need for one another that binds us together, that brings us limping and laughing into relationships and keeps us at it when we otherwise might despair at the fix we are in. I say it is the holy we need, the eternal beyond our comprehension, and one place we can find it is here, working and worshipping together. And I say there is a transcendent value worthy of our loyalty, upon which we may set our hearts, and its divine manifestation is love.

⁵³ Vanessa Rush Southern, Service of the Living Tradition. General Assembly, 2013. Louisville, Kentucky.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTION: BIBLICAL

What is the role of music in faith formation in the Bible?

Unitarian Universalism is not a Biblical religion although its roots are grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition and there are still some churches today that are much more Christian than the denomination as a whole. However, a study of music in the Bible as a means for faith formation would have value. A study of how Israel maintained her identity even in exile through a study of the psalms (in particular 137) may offer some insights into faith formation.

Introduction

A brief look at music in the Hebrew testament of the Bible suggests that it is intrinsic to the development of an identity not only as a people or a nation but also as a people of faith. Music is also critical in cultivating and embodying one's faith. The Psalms give us an even better picture of the role of music in faith formation and identity development. A longer look at one psalm in particular, Psalm 137, helps us see how music sustains identity and can help evolve faith even when one is enslaved or perhaps because of this. Finally, while it is clear that the Psalms still have a role in modern devotional life it is intriguing to explore the how the message of Psalm 137 endures in the context of the twenty-first century.

A Brief Exploration of Music in the Bible

Herbert Lockyer begins his book *All the Music of the Bible: The Minstrelsy and Music of God's People* with this wonderful sentence, “Human history is rich with music, though music predates any human musical expression.”⁵⁴ Before there were people, the world of God was filled with music- birds chirping and singing to welcome in a new day, the crashing rhythmic percussion of the waves on the beaches, the rustling of the leaves and the wind moving through the trees, the chatter and calls of one animal to another. These sounds filled the air and created a lovely music that eventually fell on the ears of humans and led them to imitate the sounds of the natural world around them. These were the first baby steps towards humans creating music.

From the beginning, music and ritual were tied together. From planting crops to sending young men out to hunt, to babies being born and elders dying music has been woven into the very fabric of human life. It makes sense, then, that the ancient peoples incorporated music into their prayers, celebrations and tributes to God or gods as well.

What we know of music during Biblical (or ancient) times is limited because not much was written down but passed orally from one generation to the next. Much of what we do know comes from scholarly study of the Bible. However, archaeological digs taking place in the Biblical lands have yielded some interesting and remarkable finds. In the 1950's, one such dig in Syria brought to light a set of clay tablets with characters from the Hurrian language etched into them dating back to around 1400 BCE. The tablets

⁵⁴ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Music of the Bible: The Minstrelsy and Music of God's People*, Hendrickson Publishers, (1968), 3.

contained the instructions for a performance by a singer and harpist of a hymn to the goddess Nikal and expressed the love the goddess had for her people.⁵⁵

All the references to music in the Hebrew testament suggest that music played an important role in the lives of the Hebrew people. According to Lockyer, references to music, praise and singing in the Bible outnumber the references to prayer or praying by almost 2 to 1. This means that twice as many biblical passages refer to music as they do to prayer.⁵⁶ The most important form of music was song although musical instruments are certainly referred to, particularly as a way to support the song. The mention of the use of musical instruments has a clear pattern in the Bible with them being mentioned a lot in the early texts of the Hebrew testament, less so in the more recent of these, and not at all in the Christian Testament until the Revelation of John.⁵⁷ This does not mean to say the importance of music changed but rather suggests that musical instrumentation evolved so that song became one form of expression while instrumental music developed an independent and fuller expression.

Music for the Hebrews was very much a part of their life. Every family feast was accompanied with music especially in the homes of the wealthy that had singers on staff or enslaved. Songs and music were used in daily worship and also at special festivals and feasts (Num. 10:10; Lev. 23:23-25). Singing and dancing was part of sending off loved ones as they departed on a journey (Gen.31:27). Prophets found the words of God

⁵⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid, 7.

through music (2 Kgs 3:15). Music was used during burials and funerals as part of the mourning process or to relieve despair or a distressing spirit (1 Sam. 16:23).⁵⁸

The songs in the Hebrew text are diverse and reflect many different themes. A very common theme is that of deliverance as when the Red Sea is divided (Exod. 15:1-21), when Yahweh reveals the well in Beer (Num. 21:16-18) and the sung exhortation of Moses at the end of his life (Deut. 32:1-43). “Barak and Deborah sang the day the Lord delivered Sisera and his army into the hands of the children of Israel (Jdg. 5:1-31). Hannah sang when Lord gave her a son, Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1-10). David, the king of Israel, sang of the wonders the Lord had done for him and by the spirit of prophesy (2 Sam. 22:1-51). Solomon, his son and heir, also sang before Jehovah (Song of Songs). Finally,...Isaiah’s restoration song in which he promises the captive Jews in Babylon that they shall sing again as though they were home in Israel on a festival night (Isa. 30:29-33).”⁵⁹

Music, whether sung or with instruments, is clearly important in the developing identity of the Hebrew people as shown in the stories and events of the Hebrew testament. It is also a means to preserve the history of this people. The songs and music of these ancient Hebrew people carries the tune of their life experiences, often of anguish, injustice and struggle, but throughout the tune is the unwavering and strong melody of a faith in God’s love.

Yet, there is more music and song in the Hebrew testament we need to explore and so with this background we can move to the Psalms.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 7-8.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 10.

The Psalms in General

The psalms can be referred to as the Biblical Songbook. Most songbooks or hymnals have a wide range of music styles and themes, tones and moods but none has as wide a range as does the Psalms. The Psalms explore the depths and breadths of human experience including exuberance and despair, longing and loneliness and anything in between.⁶⁰

There are one hundred and fifty psalms, depending on the translation, and they are considered sacred poems or songs, generally set to music. Traditionally they are divided into five books or sections. Some of the psalms are hymns to be sung by a congregation. Some are “songs of ascent” and sung by pilgrims approaching the temple. There are also simply pilgrim psalms. Some are private prayers. Some are lyrical devices to record the history of the Hebrew people. Some are praises and songs of thanksgiving. Some are laments or supplications. Some psalms are wisdom songs offered as instruction. Some are confessions of trust. Finally, there are psalms called “royal psalms” written specifically for the king.⁶¹

The poetry and depth of the Psalms resonates with people still today. The richness of the language and the use of metaphor are understood by the modern human heart. The expression of the breadth of human experience found in the Psalms is profound and so it makes sense that they are often used in times of crisis or despair. The psalms, like any

⁶⁰ Timothy Beal. *Biblical Literacy: The Essential Bible Stories Everyone Needs to Know*, Harper Collins: NY, NY, (2009), 127.

⁶¹ Sparknotes by Barnes and Noble, <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/oldtestament/section13.rhtml> (accessed April 2, 2014)

good poetry, speak directly to personal experience while universalizing what it means to be human.

Psalm 137

Psalm 137 is a very well-known psalm not only today but throughout history. It is a psalm of lament but also of imprecation which means that it has in its text the invocation of judgment or curse against enemies, in this case the Babylonians. Psalm 137 is a psalm of memory, mourning and anger. It is poetic and tender, charming and patriotic. And yet it ends with two of the most troubling and terrifying verses such that when the Psalm is recalled, these two verses, 8-9, are often left out. Below is the New Revised Standard Version of the Psalm in its entirety (three more translations appear in Appendix F):

1 By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. 2 On the willows there we hung up our harps. 3 For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" 4 How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! 6 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. 7 Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!" 8 O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be

*who pay you back what you have done to us! 9 Happy shall they be who
take your little ones and dash them against the rock!*⁶²

The psalm is organized into three strophes or stanzas: Part I, verses 1 through 4, describe the setting and context of lament for Jerusalem, coupled with a refusal to cooperate with a Babylonian demand to sing a song of Zion. This section ends with a question asserting an impossible positive response to this demand. It points to the personal response in Part II, verse 5 and 6, which has the psalmist vowing to recall Jerusalem, thus a reversal of verse 1. Part III, verses, 7 through 9, are a plea for God to take revenge on the Babylonians.⁶³

For the purposes of this paper, part I and part II of the psalm will be our focus. It is here where we can learn the most about identity and faith formation and the role music has in this.

This psalm describes a period called the Babylonian exile in which Nebuchadnezzar II exiled many of the upper class of Judah to Babylon in three waves from 597 to 581 BCE. The Jews did not suffer much in the physical sense during this exile but it certainly had an impact psychically and psychologically. There is great sadness in these displaced people living in a land that is not their own. They weep in sadness and longing but this turns to anger over being mocked by the Babylonians who request them to sing a song of Zion. How can they sing in a strange land?

In those days, Judaism meant living in the constant presence of God who dwelled in the temple. The temple was the center of Jewish religion and life. God's presence was

⁶² Biblia.Com a Bible Study online, <http://biblia.com/bible/nrsv/Ps137> (accessed April 2, 2014)

⁶³ George Savran, "How Can We Sing a Song of the Lord? The Strategy of Lament in Psalm 137," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (Volume 112, Issue 1 January 2000), 43.

felt when one could be near the temple or visit it; one clearly knew God was with the Jewish people. With the exile the land, the temple and God no longer felt present. A clear identity as God's chosen people felt taken away by the captors. Where was God, where was the temple, where was the land that helped identify them? It is no wonder the psalm represents profound sadness and loss. Nebuchadrezzar II allowed the Hebrew people to worship in their own way and with their own God while in exile. This allowed for certain continuity of the Jewish faith and her traditions. While it might have been easy to assimilate into Babylonian culture which had a strong and sophisticated society, they did not. This was for at least two reasons. First, one of the earliest exiles was the prophet Ezekial who served as a spiritual guide to the displaced and depressed captives. Second, the exiles had a strong system of elders that helped hold them together.⁶⁴

When Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed the exiles to return to Jerusalem they returned with "a tradition refined by the rise of the scribal profession, deeply committed to ethnic purity centered on the rebuilt temple and yet enriched by universalistic monotheistic values."⁶⁵ All of this enabled Judaism to maintain a clearly defined identity at the same time birthing a Judaism that was more universal in scope and understanding. God was not simply of the temple or of the land. God has no borders and God's love is not confined.

The actual practices of the Jewish people in maintaining their faith had a clear, profound and lasting impact on Jewish identity and the Jewish faith. But what of the role of the song and the harps described in the first part of the psalm as contributing to the

⁶⁴ Shimon Bakon, "Exile and Return," *The Jewish Bible Quarterly* (Vol. 31. No. 2 2003).

⁶⁵ New World Encyclopedia, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Babylonian_Exile (accessed April 4, 2014)

identity of the Hebrews? Interestingly, I could not find a single scholar who addressed the topic of music or song in Psalm 137 as a way to establish or maintain Jewish identity. But let's consider what we know.

Music and song has a strong presence in the Hebrew text and this presence is associated with almost every aspect of life from the mundane to the sacred. The Hebrews are held captive in a foreign land but they live much as they did in Jerusalem with many rituals and traditions still in place. The exiles are sad and weep over their dispossessed land and their temple. Like many people before them and many peoples after they turn to music for consolation and support. They did this with ambivalence. How could they sing their songs in a foreign land? Would the songs have the same meaning when not sung in the temple or on pilgrimage to the temple or in the presence of God? Could they even have the same meaning?

Add to this the mockery of the captors demanding a song of Zion. Or was it a suggestion to ease the pain of the captivity, to remember, to help heal? Either way, the harps were hung in the trees. How could they sing? They were resigned. And yet, if one does not sing the songs of the tradition, of the faith, how is one to remember? How is the religion, the faith, to remain intact? Is it not easy to sing, to pray, to praise when things are good? How much harder and possibly more critical to sing, to pray, to praise when it is hard? When all is lost there is nothing left to do but sing God's song and to pray.

Indeed, the whole psalm is a song. On the Bible Study website CJ Vaughan wrote:

Observe that this very Psalm in which the question is asked, "How can we sing?" is itself a song, one of the Lord's songs, still. Nothing can be more sad, more desponding. It speaks of weeping in the remembrance of Zion; it speaks of harps hung upon the willows by exiles who have no heart to use them; and yet the very telling of these sorrows, of this incapacity for song, is a song still. We chant it in our congregations now, hundreds and

thousands of years after its composition, as one of the Church's melodies, as one of the Lord's songs. It gives us a striking example of the variety, of the versatility of worship, even in that department which might seem to be all joyous, all praise. The very refusal to sing may be itself a song. Any real utterance of good thoughts, whether they be thoughts of gladness or thoughts of sorrow, may be a true hymn, a true melody for the congregation, even though it may not breathe at every moment the very thought of all the worshippers. "How shall we sing?" is itself a permanent hymn, an inspired song, for all the churches.⁶⁶

Music and songs are integral to faith formation and identity. The captive Hebrews remember their lives in Jerusalem and their faith in God and ritual practice in the temple by remembering their songs. And while they may be reluctant to sing these songs to their captives, sing they must.

Modern uses of Psalm 137

Today many psalms are prayed, sung, and performed but not, it seems, to the extent of psalm 137. It has an enduring message especially when the last two verses are left off. Throughout history, Psalm 137 has inspired, encouraged or sustained those in captivity or those feeling alienated in a foreign land. Pope Gregory X recited this psalm before departing for the Crusades. Psalm 137 was used by Frederick Douglass in a Fourth of July speech in 1852 to denounce the holiday as one for the White people and not the Black people enslaved in a foreign land.⁶⁷ Dorothy Day, the Catholic activist, used it for inspiration and prayer. It has empowered young Jamaicans in a struggle for identity.

⁶⁶ Bible Study tools, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-137-1.html> (assessed April 2014)

⁶⁷ History.com, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/frederick-douglass> (May 2014)

Christian social activists used it as a Bible study before traveling to Haiti after the devastation there.

In some Jewish communities, Psalm 137 is recited before the Birkat Hamazon on the days when Psalm 136 is not used. Some Christians recite it leading up to Easter.

Psalm 137 has inspired several literary pieces and has also been set to music by many composers and musicians, once again omitting the last verse (s). Here are just a few:

- Latin settings (*Super Flumina Babylonis*) by Palestrina (1525–1594), Orlando di Lasso (1532–1594), Philippe de Monte (1521–1603) and Nicolas Gombert (c. 1495 – c. 1560) as 4-voice motets. French baroque settings of the same Latin text by Marc-Antoine Charpentier and Michel-Richard Delalande
- William Billings adapted the text to describe the British occupation of Boston in his anthem "Lamentation over Boston".
- It was the inspiration for the famous slave chorus *Va, pensiero* from the Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) opera Nabucco.
- In the William Walton cantata *Belshazzar's Feast* a version of the opening section is set to music, as if sung by the Israelite captives in Babylon.
- It was set, as *On the Willows*, in the Stephen Schwartz Broadway musical *Godspell*.
- "Rivers of Babylon" is a rastafarian song written and recorded by Brent Dowe and Trevor McNaughton of the Jamaican reggae group The Melodians in 1970
- It was the inspiration for Leonard Cohen's "By the Rivers Dark" on his 2001 album Ten New Songs.

- The artist Fernando Ortega based the song "City of Sorrows" on Psalm 137.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The Hebrew testament shows how intricately connected music and song is to faith identity and formation. It is through the integration of songs and ritual that music becomes as much a part of faith as prayer or sacrifice. Music announces worship, calls people to prayer and weaves through ritual. It is no surprise then that the psalms have a place in the Bible but also in the hearts of the faithful everywhere. Psalm 137 speaks to the specific instances of oppression, slavery and injustice endured by people since Babylon but also to the universal innate suffering and lament that can be the human condition. What heals us? What keep us grounded in faith? What allows us to hear God is with us? Song.

⁶⁸ Wikipedia, [En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_137](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_137) (May 2014)

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH QUESTION: SOCIOLOGICAL

Sociological

How do people develop a religious identity?

Certain people identify as Christian or Jewish or Muslim. Some people identify themselves as spiritual but not religious. Others identify as practicing Buddhism or an earth-centered tradition. In Unitarian Universalism, one can identify as any of the above as well as a Unitarian Universalist. Others are not affiliated with any religious organization and consider themselves “nones.” This project takes a look at how the songs and stories of our faith traditions might help shape a religious identity.

Introduction

In order to understand religious identity it is important to understand the definition of identity and how it develops. In this chapter, I will look at several different scholars and examine their work on identity and identity development. From a clear sense of identity development or identity formation we can move to other forms of identity development such as a religious identity. In examining religious identity we will also need to explore the various definitions and perceptions of religion. It is important to understand the factors that can help promote a strong religious identity. Two of these

factors , Finally, from this point, we can determine the role stories and songs have in shaping a religious identity.

What is identity?

The term *identity*, as I have learned in doing research for this project, is challenging and ambiguous. The term *identity* is one that encompasses a broad spectrum of understanding and whose definition is understood from many different fields of study including philosophy, sociology and psychology. Defining or comprehending identity is further complicated by the term itself. The word *identity* comes from the Latin root *idem* which means ‘same’ and yet identity implies both difference and sameness. For instance, our identity is something unique to ourselves and distinguishes us from others. Our driver’s licenses and our need to protect ourselves from identity theft support this idea of identity. At the same time, identity also points to a relationship beyond the individual and to a broader social group such as a national or cultural identity or a gender identity, etc. In this second understanding of identity there is a broader understanding that identity is partly what we share with others. It also suggests what we have something in common with or that we have similarities to a larger group.⁶⁹

Exploring identity and identity development takes place across disciplines and through these two aspects of identity. On one level a person’s identity is distinct and shaped by one’s personal biography. This study of identity then falls to the philosophers

⁶⁹ Mizuko Ito et al. “Foreword.” *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. Edited by David Buckingham. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008. vii–ix.

and the psychologists. On another level, a person's identity is shaped by those things outside of the self: social, cultural, national and biological as well as shared values, histories and interests. This area of understanding identity is studied by the sociologists. Of course there are many subfields when it comes to understanding identity, such as social theory, cultural studies, and symbolic interactions to name just a few. The goal of this chapter is to come to understand how a relationship to or an identification with social or cultural groups affects and shapes one's religious identity and so will almost exclusively consider identity within the discipline of sociology.

A Brief Review of Several Scholars on Identity

Jean- Paul Sartre sees people as creators of their own identity. Our freedom of choice allows us to shape and define, redesign and rebuild our identity. In his view, we do not act a certain way because of who we are. Instead, by acting a certain way we establish an identity. He argues that,

Our free actions are not the consequence of our identity, they are its foundation- and it is our nature as human beings to always go beyond who we are towards a freely chosen self. Our commitments allow us to become people we might not have become and illuminate a set of priorities that might have remained obscure. Yet we are not slaves to but creators of our existence...⁷⁰

Human beings are not confined by present circumstances; identity rises above. In addition, as we become aware of a certain aspect of our identity it loses hold and we must choose how to respond.

⁷⁰ Stephen Wang, "Identity and Freedom in *Being and Nothingness*" <http://philosophynow.org/issues/64>. (May 2014)

However, Sartre fully comprehends that there are factors outside of human control; we are natural and cultural beings. As such we need this complex environment to give shape to our identity and we need relationships to help understand who we are.

Even though choice and freedom are essential to identity development and the world around us has influence, too, Sartre believes human beings have a basic essence. For every human being there is an essence, a certain original structure that does not change. It is invariable and remains true for that person throughout the life of that individual.⁷¹ And yet, we can build upon this and go beyond it.

One way of looking at identity is that it is the personal attributes inside an individual that determines who that person is and that there is a fixed identity at the heart of the individual that determines their character. Michel Foucault rejected this idea. Instead, “identity is communicated to others in your interactions with them, but this is not a fixed thing inside a person. It is a shifting, temporary construct.”⁷² Foucault argues that who we are is not a matter of individual choice. The human is subject and object of political, scientific, economic, philosophical, legal, social, historical (and more) enterprises. Much of what we use to shape and define our identities is social construct and as such is contingent, impermanent and dispensable.

David Buckingham presents comprehensive and yet broad reviews of the current work in understanding identity and discusses several different approaches and theories in his work “Introducing Identity.” Several of these approaches are worth discussion in this paper.

⁷¹ Ibid, 3.

⁷² David Ganutlett, “Michel Foucault,” <http://www.theory.org.uk/ctr-foul.htm> (April 2014)

David Buckingham describes the “traditional, functionalist account” of identity development as a passive process such that, a young person receives from adult influences and so *becomes* rather than already *is*. Yet, he suggests that identity formation, particularly in the modern era, deserves a more refined understanding. He writes that there is a wide body of work that is concerned with the relations between the individual and group identities. This research looks at several factors such as:

How people categorize or label themselves and others, how they identify as members of particular groups; how a sense of group belonging or “community” is developed and maintained, and how groups discriminate against outsiders; how the boundaries between groups operate, and how groups relate to each other; and how institutions define and organize identities.⁷³

This work cannot separate out the individual from the group. It recognizes a constant identity development at separate levels and also as an interaction at both levels. Another important factor here is the interplay of the individual and the social group. Individuals need to claim who they are but that claim also needs to be recognized by others. In seeking to define who they are individually a person also wants to join others for affirmation.⁷⁴

From this understanding that identity development is at once individual and social, Richard Jenkins has suggested that identity is not a “fixed possession” but a social process in which the individual and the social are “inextricably related.” As Buckingham describes this idea, “Individual selfhood is a social phenomenon, but the social world is constituted through the actions of individuals. As such, identity is a fluid, contingent

⁷³ Ibid, 6.

⁷⁴ Ibid

matter- it is something we accomplish practically through our ongoing interactions and negotiations with other people.”⁷⁵

In his paper, Buckingham also considers the work of Anthony Giddens, whose thoughts on identity are relevant to the question at hand in this work. Giddens suggests that “many of the beliefs and customary practices that used to define identities in traditional societies (such as those of organized religion) are now less and less influential.”⁷⁶ In this modern world where tradition has less impact, people have the ability to make choices that determine their life narratives from a wider spectrum of guidance such as the media or Oprah Winfrey. As a result, individuals have to constantly be making decisions about what they should do and who they should be. Identity becomes a sort of ongoing project. Giddens sees identity as fluid and not fixed in this modern world. As a result, the individual is under much more stress, has more responsibility and therefore is much more vulnerable in today’s modern world.⁷⁷

Finally, in accordance with Giddens, Buckingham sites Zygmunt Bauman when he suggests that comprehending identity and identity development profoundly matters in our fast paced and changing world. In some areas of the world it is even a matter of life and death. Many factors in the modern world including globalization, economic insecurity, decline of the welfare state, increasing social mobility, and insecurity in personal relationships contribute to a sense of uncertainty and even fragmentation so that the “traditional resources for identity formation are no longer so straightforward or so

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid

easily available.”⁷⁸ This state of affairs has an impact on modern day religious identity development and so we will return to this a bit later in the chapter.

Culture and Identity

When one considers identity and identity formation one has to look at culture. At the most basic, culture is the “knowledge, language, values, customs, and material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a human group or society.”⁷⁹ It is composed of ideas, behavior and material possessions. We learn about culture through interaction, observation and imitation. Culture provides the means by which we interpret the world. Culture also refers to the process of social transmission by which we pass on these interpretations, thoughts and behaviors.

Members who consciously identify themselves with a group (nationality, ethnicity, region, common interests, religion, etc.) are identifying with a particular culture. This is one’s cultural identity. Each of us has a cultural identity and sometimes even more than one. Cultural identity is important to the health and well-being of the individual. Identifying with a particular culture helps people feel they belong and helps them to feel secure. It opens up access to social networks and provides support.⁸⁰

We can further define culture into the material and the nonmaterial culture. The material culture consists of the tangible, physical human creations that we use and share

⁷⁸ Ibid, 1.

⁷⁹ Diana Kendall, “Chapter 2: Culture,” in *Sociology in our Times* (Independence, KY: Cengage Learning, 2007) 39.

⁸⁰ Ministry of Social Development, <http://socialreport.msd.govt.nz/cultural-identity/> (April 27 2014)

while the nonmaterial culture is the intangible or abstract creations of humans that influence and help define a group.⁸¹

Beliefs, values, rules, language, and political systems are aspects of nonmaterial culture. Beliefs are defined as the acceptance or conviction that something is real or true. Beliefs may be based on tradition, experience, faith or scientific research or any combination of these things.⁸²

Cultures vary widely from each other but it is generally understood that every culture has four common nonmaterial cultural components which are language, symbols, values and norms. Language is how ideas and beliefs are transmitted and how people learn about their cultural heritage. Language also helps people develop a sense of personal identity in relationship to the group.⁸³ Symbols are things that represent something else but with meaning and purporting some value. Values are shared ideas about what is right and wrong or good and bad. Values provide us with the criteria by which we make judgments on people, events and objects. As opposed to values, norms are “the established rules of behavior or standards of conduct.”⁸⁴

Culture then is important in determining how people think and act. It shapes their beliefs and values. Culture establishes the groups we belong to and the social interactions we create. It ascertains place in the world and helps guide our interpretations and meaning-making in it. Culture determines our roles and interactions within our groups

⁸¹ Kendall, *Sociology in our Times*, 42.

⁸² Ibid, 43.

⁸³ Ibid, 50.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 52.

and sets standards of behavior outside the borders of our own cultural identity. Culture helps clarify, define and shape our identity.

Religion and Identity

In any college level Sociology textbook one can find a chapter on education and religion, often coupled together, as powerful and influential forces in society. Both institutions impact and impart values and beliefs that are deemed important for healthy function in society. Both religion and education also influence the culture and at the same time socializes people into the culture. Let us turn our focus to religion and consider it as simply and broadly as possible in terms of identity and identity development. This is an enormous topic that numerous books have been written about and generations of men and women have studied and so the information presented in this section should be considered as only scratching the surface.

What is religion? Patrick McNamara said that to try to define religion is to invite an argument and Saint Augustine said, essentially, that if you do not ask it is definable but if asked it is not easy to say. Here are a few more statements and quotes that further define religion⁸⁵:

Immanuel Kant: “Religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine commands.”

Ludwig Feuerbach: “Religion is a dream, in which our own conceptions and emotions appear to us as separate existences, being out of ourselves.”

⁸⁵ <http://web.pdx.edu/~tothm/religion/Definitions.htm> (accessed May 2014)

William James: “The very fact that they are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that the word 'religion' cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name.”

Rudolph Otto: “Religion is that which grows out of, and gives expression to, experience of the holy in its various aspects.”

John Dewey: “The religious is any activity pursued on behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of its general and enduring value.”

Paul Tillich: “Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of life.”

J. Milton Yinger: “Religion is a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problem of human life.”

Clifford Geertz: “Religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in [people] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”

Cunningham, et al.: “Religion signifies those ways of viewing the world which refer to (1) a notion of sacred reality (2) made manifest in human experience (3) in such a way as to produce long-lasting ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (4) with respect to problems of ordering and understanding existence.”

Huston Smith: “Wherever people live, whenever they live, they find themselves faced with three inescapable problems: how to win food and shelter from their natural environment (the problem nature poses), how to get along with one another (the social problem), and how to relate themselves to the total scheme of things (the religious problem). If this third issue seems less important than the other two, we should remind ourselves that religious artifacts are the oldest that archaeologists have discovered.”

These definitions suggest a personal aspect to the religious experience and point to a relationship beyond oneself to that which is of “ultimate concern.” But they also help us to see that religion is more than the individual and in fact is a social construct meant to help people “struggle with the ultimate problem of human life.”

Emile Durkheim, whose field was the sociology of religion, stressed that religion was a communal rather than an individual phenomena, that is, that religion is eminently social. He wrote, “religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church all those who adhere to them.”

Durkheim was concerned not with the varieties of religious experiences, as William James was, but with the communal activity of religion and the communal bonds which arise with communal religious activities.⁸⁶

Religious identity development is both a personal and social enterprise and as such religious identity can be studied from the psychological perspective as with the Freudian psychologist Erik Erikson or from a sociological framework. For this paper, religious identity refers to the identification of the individual to a particular religious

⁸⁶ Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*. (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1977), 136.

tradition and therefore leans more heavily on research from the sociological field while still appreciating the individual psychological components of religious identity. In this vein, Hans Mol and J.R. Seul suggest that since religions “rest on metaphysical and ethical beliefs drawn from a shared religious tradition, they form a key influence on an individual’s perspectives of themselves and the world.”⁸⁷ Religious identity development is understood as a process. Through this process the individual makes clear their beliefs and values and their faith, to themselves and to others, and then connect themselves to a religious institution. Involvement in a religious organization includes participation in worship, religious education and other community activities as well as contributing to the institution through membership commitment, pledging or tithing and volunteerism. It also involves personal spiritual development such as prayer, meditation or other spiritual practices. Participation in the life of a congregation or religious institution solidifies and strengthens the religious identity of the individual.

Yet, as research indicates, today, more and more people are not reporting any religious affiliation.⁸⁸ These people are considered the “nones” and each year their numbers are rising. In fact, these studies show several factors as to why this is true. One factor is that as society becomes more scientifically advanced, institutional religion weakens. Another is that as society becomes more complex people become less

⁸⁷ David Moulin, “Negotiating and Constructing Religious Identities. REA Annual Meeting,” www.religioeducation.net (accessed April 2014)

⁸⁸ Pew Research Religion and Life Project, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/> (accessed May 2014)

connected to tradition and more interested in exploring new options.⁸⁹ Some other factors include distrust in institutions, the politicization of religion and a worldview that is contrary to church teachings, such as, not being concerned about a person's sexuality where the church seems to consider homosexuality a sin.

Where once upon a time religious identity might have been a social and cultural given determined by family and heritage, in today's modern world religious identity is more likely to be chosen rather than assigned. Religion is much more today a matter of choice and not a matter of birth. Yet there are consequences to personal choice. Edward Queen, director of the D. Abbott Turner Program in Ethics, suggests that choice allows religious identity to become "nothing more than a privatized affair without deep connections to the historical traditions of the community of faith."⁹⁰

But there is another factor that affects religious identity worth mentioning, and that is pluralism. Pluralism challenges a strong religious identity because diversity widens and broadens how the group defines itself. The overall religious identity, while inclusive, must be all encompassing to include many views and positions. For example, if you ask an Orthodox Jew or a Quaker what they believe or what they stand for you might also be able to extrapolate from their response that the religious community to which they belong also believes in the same way. If you ask a Unitarian Universalist what they believe it will be wrapped in the context of "this is my belief but not necessarily what all of us believe." Pluralism is both a gift and a tremendous challenge in creating a religious identity and yet, finding a common or unifying theology that serves as an umbrella under

⁸⁹ John D. Carl. *Think Sociology* (Midwest City, OK: Prentice Hall, 2010), 273.

⁹⁰ Edward L. Queen II, "The Formation and Reformation of Religious Identity," http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/sites/partners/erpp/CJC_Queen.htm (accessed May 2014)

which this pluralism lives is not impossible and could help determine a stronger religious identity for Unitarian Universalists.

In shaping a religious identity, then, we need to consider the traditional ways religious identity is determined (birth and tradition). And we also must be aware of how choice impacts religious identity in the context of the modern issues facing America today (the factors supporting the rise of the “nones”). We must also consider a modern world where pluralism and diversity are influencing and impacting every aspect of our lives. Confronted with all of this how does a religious identity remain intact, and in fact, become stronger in contemporary society?

Some Factors that Help make Religious Identity Strong

Before we get to music and stories, which are the two central factors my project addresses we should take a look at a few other factors that can help with religious identity. These are rituals, strictness of membership, and focus on community over the individual.

Rituals promote group cohesion and thus religious identity. Rituals require members to engage in activities or behavior that would be too costly or risky to fake. Some such activities clearly indicate religious identity and would be things like praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, fasting during Ramadan or Lent, praying five times a day in a Mosque, keeping the Sabbath, or dressing a certain way, even the spiritual act of tithing comes with a certain level of risk and cost (sacrifice).⁹¹ Other ritual activities come with less of a cost as the first list but, nevertheless, still involve a personal

⁹¹ Richard Sosis, “The Adaptive Value of Religious Ritual,” *Anthropology* (Annual Editions 07/08), 151.

commitment or sacrifice. These might be personal prayer, wearing a cross or chalice (symbol of Unitarian Universalism), eating kosher, or giving up meat on Friday.

Rituals signal commitment to the other members of the group. By engaging in the ritual the person is saying “I believe this. I am a part of this group.” Further, those who engage in the “ritual requirements imposed by a religious group can be trusted to believe sincerely in the doctrines of their respected religious communities” and further those communities that impose the greatest demands also demand the greatest adherence and devotion.⁹²

While we can document many theories as to why churches are in decline in this modern era, one could argue that this is not true of all denominations. There is some evidence that those religions that have high expectations of membership are actually stable or even growing, in particular the Mormons, Emergent Churches and Islam. Denominational growth rate correlates with clearly defined membership and strictness.⁹³ What is a strict church (or religion)? According to Iannaccone, strict churches claim an exclusive truth, they demand adherence to a distinctive faith, and they censure non-believers.⁹⁴

This definition bumps up against the definition of fundamentalism or even fanatical churches. Yet, when the definition is unpacked a bit, there seems validity in asserting strictness as a way to maintain a strong religious identity. For instance, what would Unitarian Universalism (or any other religion look like) if when people signed the

⁹² Ibid, 153.

⁹³ Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches are Strong,” *American Journal of Sociology* (Volume 99 Number March 1994), 1180.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 1182.

membership book they also signed up for two years of mission work or to give a certain amount of their income to the church or if attendance to three worship services a month was encouraged and enforced. Could taking membership more seriously or making it harder to become a member strengthen religious identity and foster growth?

For the last factor in this section, focusing on the religious community over the individual, we return to Robert Bella. In his lecture at General Assembly in 1998, called *Unitarian Universalism in Societal Perspective*, he asserts that religious liberalism and American culture do not have a social understanding of human beings. That is, we start from a place of ontological individualism, the idea that individuals are real and society is secondary. Therefore, it is not the church that gives rise to believers, but the believers who give rise to the church. This is true of society as well: individuals are fundamental and society is derivative.⁹⁵

Bellah further asserts a fallacy in this and suggests that ontological individualism is both theologically and sociologically false. Humans are fundamentally relational and social creatures which he confirms with biological and sociological examples. That we lift up in our culture and in our religions the individual as primary and fundamental is a mistake with enormous consequences to Americans and to religion. With this in mind, his recommendation to Unitarian Universalists is to move the seventh principle which is *respect for the interdependent web of all existence* from the last principle to the first thus moving the first principle about *inherent worth and dignity* to last.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Robert Bella, "Unitarian Universalism in Societal Perspective," *Lecture Series at General Assembly* (Rochester, NY 1998), 9.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 10.

What would it mean to cherish, uplift and support the religious community over the needs, desires and beliefs of the individual? Shifting the focus from the individual to the community could very well be a key factor in strengthening religious identity and Unitarian Universalism in the 21st century.

Story and Identity

Years ago when I was trying to learn more about the Jewish holiday of Passover I came across a video by a young, hip Rabbi on YouTube . In the video he explains that one of the most important things about Passover is the story of Moses or the Haggadah. The reason it is important, he said, was because it helped with Jewish identity. The story of Moses and the plagues and the Red Sea was so powerful because generations of Jews before today told the story, the same story with few variations over and over again. And, he said, future generations of Jews would tell this same story, over and over again with few variations, long into the future. The Jewish identity was maintained far back into the past, through today, and into the future by the telling and retelling of this Exodus story.

We are shaped by stories. Gail Forsythe-Vail writes in her book Stories in Faith that “people throughout the ages and across the cultures love stories. We are collectors and tellers of stories- about our lives, our world, and those who came before. We find new meaning in creating and sharing stories. They bring communities together and transmit collective wisdom about larger questions of identity and values.”⁹⁷ Stories are integral to identity development and faith formation.

⁹⁷ Gail Forsythe-Vail, *Stories in Faith* (Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2007), 1.

Stories are the histories of a community. They reflect the wisdom and experiences of that community. Stories are meant to be told again and again and again in this way strengthening the bonds of community. Stories remind us of who we are, what we believe and what we value. Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, wrote that “stories create a coherent universe with a place for every sparrow, every orphan child.”⁹⁸ Thus stories help us find where we belong and to whom we belong. They help us find our place in the universe.

With each retelling we can derive new meaning from the story. “When we hear a familiar story, it is not the single unadorned telling of the tale we hear. Our minds vibrate with overtones from other times we have heard the story and meanings it has already brought to our lives.”⁹⁹ In the retelling we connect deeper to the story, deeper to the meaning of it allowing us to access the wisdom therein.

Stories shape and change us and help us define who we are. They also connect us to family, community and faith traditions. Stories also connect us to something (God, mystery, spirit, Love) beyond ourselves. The telling of stories and the retelling of them solidifies religious identity and our understanding of who we are as people of faith.

Music and Identity

Herbert Lockyer’s wonderful and insightful book, All the Music of the Bible: The Minstrelsy and Music of God’s People, begins with this paragraph:

Music. What is the mystery that gives flight to the imagination, touches the deepest emotions, and speaks to the soul? From poets and mystics to

⁹⁸ Jeanette Ross, *Telling our Tales* (Boston, MA: Skinner House Books, 1994), ix.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 2.

saints and sinners, from antiquity to the immediacy of each breath we take, music communicates when words cannot. Since the dawn of creation, artists have been exploring the many ways in which music communicates beyond words. Indeed, music is a language unto itself, a language born in the heart of God countless ages before creation.¹⁰⁰

Like stories, music is a narrative from which we draw meaning. Music shapes and changes us and helps us define who we are. It connects us to the past and to the present as well as to family, tradition, community, nationality, ethnicity and faith traditions. Music connects us to that which is beyond words and beyond us.

Like stories, music has an important role in developing identity. Hargreaves et al suggest “that music can define and mediate interpersonal relations, regulate mood, and contribute to a sense of identity.”¹⁰¹ Music has an important role in the ‘construction, negotiation, and transformation of cultural identities’ and can create new identities while also reflecting existing ones.¹⁰²

There are several layers of identity development when it comes to music worth examining. Let’s begin with the simplest. We are immersed in music. Many children have lullabies’ sung to them at night. They are forced to listen to their parent’s music when in the car or lounging around the house. They hear particular music in their faith tradition or as part of their heritage. They hear music on television programs or jingles on commercials or musical tunes while playing video games. They experience it in ritual and ceremonies and in rites of passage. At some point the child-come-teenager will choose

¹⁰⁰ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Music of the Bible: The Minstrelsy and Music of God's People* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1968), xi.

¹⁰¹ W.M. Dabback, “Music and identity formation in older adults.” *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 9/2: 60–69. http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Dabback9_2.pdf

¹⁰² Ibid.

the genre of music they like or prefer be it hip hop, pop or some other kind. Through the choosing of their own music a young person is choosing an identity, claiming an “otherness” as their own, and proclaiming a certain level of independence. This *choosing* is both personal and social: the self-identity is being asserted at the same time that the choice connects the person to a social group, i.e. those who like pop (American Idol) or those who like death metal.

Starting from this understanding that music takes on both a subjective and collective identity, one can detect yet another layer here, and that is that music reflects the people but also produces them. As an example, when one thinks of the United States one might immediately think of rock and roll. If one thinks of Americans it might be in the light of this rock and roll identity: brash, loud, rebellious, and wild. If one thinks of India one might think of sitar music and one might associate Indians in light of sitar music: meditative, quiet, and mellow. Music reflects the people and also produces them.¹⁰³

Another layer: Simon Frith, author of *Music and Identity*, suggests that identity development is not only a social process but also an aesthetic one. When we decide what sounds right, aesthetically, when we listen to music we are expressing ourselves and our own sense of rightness. He writes

First, that identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; second, that our experience of music- of music making and music listening- is best understood as an experience of this self-process. Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social , the mind in the body and the

¹⁰³ Ivo Oliverira, “Music: A Lens to Cultural Identity” www.fairobserver.com/360theme/music-lens-cultural-identity. 2012. (accessed May 2014)

body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of ethics and aesthetics.¹⁰⁴ Music, then, is integral to identity development because it offers a sense of self *and* of others. It is subjective *and* collective. It is a quality of experience *and* an experiencing of ourselves.

From the work of Frith and others it becomes clear that music and identity are interwoven. Following from that we can conclude that religious identity and music are intertwined as well. For some insight here we can turn to Daniel J. Levitin and his book The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature. In his chapter called “Religion or ‘People Get Ready,’” he writes that humans have a brain predisposed to music because of our enlarged prefrontal cortex and the myriad bilateral connections between the cortical and sub-cortical areas. These evolutionary changes in the brain gave rise to self-consciousness which in turn gave rise to spiritual yearnings and the ability to consider meaning and concepts beyond one’s own life. Music of a religious or sacred nature, music associated with beliefs and ritual, writes Levitin, helped create early human social systems and societies.

Music helped to infuse ritual practices with meaning, to make them memorable, and to share them with our friends, family, and living groups, facilitating a social order. This yearning for meaning lies at the foundation of what makes us human.¹⁰⁵

It is not a surprise then that every culture and every human society has both religion and music. Every behavior that is remotely religious or resembles a religious

¹⁰⁴ Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, editors, *Questions of Cultural Identity* Simon Frith, 108-127(Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications,1996), 109.

¹⁰⁵ Daniel J. Levitin, *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature*,(New York, New York: Dutton/Penguin Group 2008), 147.

ritual has some form of music that accompanies it.¹⁰⁶ In most of these it is very clear that these are a social act, one that shapes and builds community. But songs and music in a religious context go a step further. They connect us to a belief system and tether us to a time and place. They also encode the ritual in our bodies and brains.¹⁰⁷

Music is highly efficient in transmitting memory and information. We are descendants of ancestors who loved music and ritual, stories and storytelling and this love remains with us today. We do not like music necessarily for its beauty in and of itself but we find it beautiful (in our souls) because our ancestors made good use of music, music and ritual creating strong cohesive groups that led ultimately to various societies and cultures.

Another way to say this is that religion and music, naturally intertwined through ritual, worked together to create the foundations of our society and work together still to create cohesive social groups and religions. This, then, is why music, and storytelling, is so important in one's faith and religious tradition. Music (and stories) is the binding agent: to our ancestors whose DNA still resides in ours; to our cohorts in this crazy world that would challenge us to be individualistic when the soul yearns for and thrives with connection; and to the children of the future whose faith will survive only if the people of today continue to tell stories and sing songs together now.

But there is one more thing. Much of the greatest music ever created was religious- from the Songs of Solomon to Handel's *Messiah* to *Amazing Grace* and *People get Ready*. Skeptics might ask why God needs us to sing praises to glorify and honor such

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 157.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

a powerful being? But believers counter this skepticism by answering that we sing praises for ourselves not for God. Rabbi Hayyim Kassorla says that God doesn't need our praise. God is not vain or needy. We sing songs of religion and belief because they help us remember, they motivate us, they bring us closer to God.

To sing for something beyond one's self is to continue to create meaning and purpose, connection and wholeness; it is to offer love and hope to a broken world. When we sing in this way, religion cannot fail or die but continue to be the way God moves through the world, ever present, ever loving, ever living. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

When I first envisioned this project I saw it is a book with stories and songs based on common themes found in Unitarian Universalist worship. In addition the songs would be on a cd or could be downloaded for an MP3 player. In my challenge statement I wrote that I would “create an educational process” in order to keep it wide open and so that as the research unfolded I would have some flexibility as to the end product. I am glad I did.

After I turned in the project proposal last winter, I took my ideas to a member of my site team who is a professor of sociology, Maria Flynn. I asked her to take a look at my proposal. We went over the sociological aspect of the project and quickly determined that a survey was a lot to undertake. It would require a large sample pool and it would involve carefully crafted questions that might not get to what I wanted to know. Maria suggested I use qualitative analysis instead. Qualitative analysis is a sociological research method that “uses interpretive description (words) rather than statistics (numbers) to analyze underlying meanings and patterns of social relationships.”¹⁰⁸ In this process I could ask questions and based on the conversation add more questions so that I could get to what I was looking for regarding themes as well as identity and faith formation through stories and songs. I would then be able to extrapolate from all the interviews the information I was seeking. She helped me shape my questions which are as follows:

¹⁰⁸ Kendall, *Sociology in our Times*, 39.

1. I hope to tap into UU themes that are not necessarily the UU principles or sources. So, I am trying to find stories that resonant with UUs because they are part of our identity but that are broader than the principles. For example, I think one theme is that we are called to do social justice work to make a world a better place and not because good works is a pathway to heaven.

What themes have you noticed in the worship at the congregation(s) you serve?

2. What stories and songs do you find that you keep turning to in worship or religious education? These are stories or songs that are used often throughout several years.

3. Is there a particular genre of music that you use in worship or is it mixed? Please identify some kinds of music you have in worship in your congregation.

4. Finally, I was raised a Methodist by my parents. Every church we went to sang the same hymns and even today my body responds to these childhood hymns before my mind even catches up. I call these hymns *soul hymns*. I find having been a UU now for over 20 years that this is true for me now with some UU hymns or songs. Do you think there are songs or hymns from our tradition that does this for you and our congregations? Do you know songs outside of the UU hymnal that resonant with UU congregations? *What are your soul hymns?* Please list.

This analysis was done in two phases with two slightly different formats. In the first phase, I actually interviewed about twenty-five colleagues on the phone. We discussed the questions and had interesting conversations around themes, songs and stories, and Unitarian Universalist identity and theology. In the second phase, I emailed seventy-five colleagues the questions and received about twenty to twenty-five emails. All in all about forty-five to fifty ministers, religious educators and music directors answered my questions. This number is not exact due to the fact that not all answers were used in the analysis because of participants not understanding the question or interpreting it in a different way than what was intended. In addition to the questions, I should add that I also examined dozens of orders of service from the participants' congregations to see if there were any answers to the questions in these documents.

As I was having these conversations about the questions with colleagues and reading/responding to their emails, two things became abundantly clear and had me shift my project idea. The first is actually rather obvious. The themes that run through Unitarian Universalist worship are similar to the themes found in any other congregation, church or synagogue. These themes are transcendence, hope and love, gratitude, diversity, community, brokenness and wholeness, generosity and abundance. While we may or may not use the Bible to support or preach on these themes nevertheless they are present. My sense was finding stories and songs on these themes would then be a multicultural and interfaith exercise and not help with Unitarian Universalist identity development or with a unified Unitarian Universalist theology.

The second point needs to be introduced with a brief story. Years ago when I was trying to learn more about the Jewish holiday of Passover I came across a video by a

young Rabbi on YouTube (I can no longer find it). In the video he explains that one of the most important things about Passover is the story of Moses or the Haggadah. The reason it is important, he said, was because it helped with Jewish identity. The story of Moses and the plagues and the Red Sea was so powerful because generations of Jews before today told the story, the same story with few variations over and over again. And, he said, future generations of Jews would tell this same story, over and over again with few variations, long into the future. The Jewish identity was maintained far back into the past, through today, and into the future by the telling and retelling of this Exodus story.

So I noticed as I talked with colleagues and read their emails that there were no stories that were told over and over again. Sometimes the story of the chalice was told more than once. Sometimes the story of the flower celebration was told more than once. But overall, no stories, uniquely Unitarian Universalist stories were told over and over again. No stories were told from generations past; none would be told into the future. In fact, it is almost taboo for a story to be told more than once. I heard this repeatedly from ministers and religious educators alike, “we never tell the same story twice.”

This discovery suggested I needed to change the project. Instead of a book of stories and songs based on common themes found in Unitarian Universalist worship I shifted to a website that would be a resource site of Unitarian Universalist stories and songs. The website is www.ourstoriesandsongs.com. The idea is to be a gathering site of our shared stories as Unitarian Universalists but also a place to share stories about our congregations that may be left untold or could possibly be lost.

In addition to stories the website serves as a gathering site for songs sung in our worship services or in our children’s religious education classes. There are a few hymns

but also many songs that are sung in congregations that should and could be embraced by the whole denomination if people knew of them. The website also has a comprehensive list of composers whose works are written for or preformed in Unitairan Universalist worship. The website directs people to the websites of the composers so that their songs and work can be shared and spread.

I decided on a website rather than a book because I wanted the resource to be growing and changing and accessible to all. My goal was not to make a small amount of money on a book, but to help develop a Unitarian Universalist identity; to share resources of stories and songs; and to spread the good news of Unitarian Universalism. While the website does not directly address a unified theology for the twenty-first century, it is a living and growing resource and as such leaves room for this to develop, perhaps naturally and organically.

However, in talking about this project with colleagues and friends I have discovered that they are thrilled by this project. They have encouraged me to still write a book and Skinner House Books (publisher) likes my idea and is interested in seeing a few chapters. I also have Joe Jencks and other musicians interested in contributing music for the book. On May 3, in a workshop at the Metro New York Annual Meeting I led a workshop on this project and my findings for a group of about twenty-five folks. The response was encouraging and had many people thinking and reflecting on the truth of this work.

Results of the Qualitative Analysis can be found in Appendix G.

Visit the final product of this project at www.ouurstoriesandsongs.com

CHAPTER 7

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Method of Evaluation 1

In February and March, a survey will be created to collect data from colleagues. I will rely on a survey tool such as SurveyMonkey and personal interviews to collect this data. Data will be stored online and created into a document accessible to the participants and to the site team through Google documents. Completion of the survey and storage of the document online will be an indicator of the completion of the task. Those interested can access the data and determine its content and value.

It should be said at the front that I was not able at all to maintain the given timeline for the proposed project. In fact, I am doing this a full year later.

As I said in the description of the project I learned early on that a survey would need a large pool of participants and it might have led more to a quantitative analysis product (which deals with numbers and graphs). After talking with a sociologist, I learned what I needed was a qualitative analysis which enabled me to use questions rather than a survey and also to use participants words and thoughts as a product of the research. This form of analysis was a key element of the project.

Once I changed the format of the analysis, I realized there was no need to have any storage of the survey or results online. What I did do was create 4 separate power points on the data collected. I also created the webpage as a result of the data collected.

I knew I had enough information once I interviewed 50 people. This was the number recommended to me by Maria Flynn, the sociologist. Four comprehensive power point documents also helped determine I had enough data to then move on.

I should also say, in addition to asking the four questions (see Description of Project and Appendix F) I also asked participants to send in twenty orders of service from a typical Sunday worship. This allowed me to review the documents for music or themes not mentioned by participants.

Learning the difference between quantitative and qualitative analysis was an important aspect of this project and clearly shaped the outcome of the work.

Method of Evaluation 2 and 3

During the months of February, March, April and May I will be talking with colleagues and others to collect their stories and musical resources. I will be examining works already published and determining if I will need to write some of my own stories or songs. All of this data will be stored online in a Google documents file which will be accessible to any interested parties. The process is complete once a significant number of stories and songs have been compiled and collected online.

Again it should be said that I was not able at all to maintain the given timeline for the proposed project. In fact, I am doing this a full year later.

I interviewed via the telephone and in person some twenty to twenty-five ministers, religious educators, and music directors. In addition I reviewed emailed responses to the four questions from an additional twenty to twenty-five more colleagues. I collected many stories and music resources which I then used on the new website.

Based on the answers to my questions I realized early on that it might be more important to find stories that already existed, particularly around Unitarian Universalism, than to create my own.

Many of the stories are from the UUA website but I have made it clear in conversations and sharing the website that I am hoping to add to the stories already on the site.

Method of Evaluation 4

Finally, the end product of the collection of the data above is the compilation of songs and stories in a book or manual usable in worship or religious education. I am hoping to also include an mp3 or CD of various songs that worship leaders and ministers could use in their congregations.

I am excited to report that instead of a book I have created an accessible website for all to use as a resource for worship and religious education. It will also further aid identity development and faith formation because more and more congregations will use the stories and songs as a way to ground us in our faith. Well, this is the goal.

In addition to the stories posted on the website, there are many resources regarding hymns and songs, musicians and composers.

The webpage is www.ouurstoriesandsongs.com. It has been connected to the new UU Minister's Association website as well which will help spread the word.

CHAPTER 8

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

I requested input from my site team, two members of which are in my congregation, on the ministerial competencies below. What I received is in italics beneath each section with my comments following these.

Theologian

A minister serving in a congregation has got to be a theologian. Ministers must be able to act as interpreters of events that happen in the lives of our congregants be that at the personal, familial, community or world level. Ministers must also be able to interpret and explain the doctrines (explicit and implicit) that define the faith of the congregation. They act as comforters in crisis but also as provocateurs for justice. All of this is the role of a minister as a theologian. My site team agrees that I have some level of competency as a theologian *in praxis*. However, a considerable aspect of this project is to actually give some thought and shape to an overarching theology of Unitarian Universalism—to actually put a name to something we are part of but not naming as well as giving some shape to a theology that will help shape a faith for the 21st century.

Clearly Rev. Tracy has done significant work in articulating an overarching UU theology. In congregational life, I see room for growth in relating theological concepts to congregant's daily lives. From my perspective, our congregation's divisions around

matters of belief have not been a helpful frame for theological considerations and relevance.

I recently co-led a workshop with a colleague of mine where I presented my project and my thoughts on identity development through stories and songs at our district Annual meeting in Morristown, NJ. The outline of the workshop is in Appendix H.

I feel I have done some deep thinking around the topic of identity development. I have preached on it several times in my congregation. We have also improved and expanded our worship services to include more stories and songs.

Preacher

A minister in a congregation has many roles with the most visible and central being that of preacher. In Unitarian Universalism there is no set liturgy or sacred text we use but, instead, have all the world's sacred and secular texts to choose from. This can be freeing in some ways and yet overwhelming in others. A lot of pressure is put on the minister to be able to inspire or intellectually stimulate or challenge or move each person in the pew. When the congregation has a diversity of views, this can be challenging. Further, the minister simply must be a great speaker and story teller weaving the fibers of thought and emotion into a beautiful tapestry that appeals to all. As a minister for fourteen years, I have been preaching weekly and steadily for eight of these having spent six years as an associate minister with irregular preaching opportunities. I am always trying to improve myself in this regard. It is the opinion of the site team that there is room for improvement in this area of ministry as well.

I have been accepted into a program created by the UU Minister's Association to work with a small group of ministers to further their preaching and worship skills. It is a two year program designed to take good preachers and help them become great. This program will be my major endeavor in addressing this competency.

You've made progress in delivery, speaking without notes, depth, and investing more of yourself in preaching. These improvements have enabled you to speak from the strength of your own core identity more clearly. I wonder whether you are trying to preach to everyone in a way that is made difficult by the differences in our congregation; would it be better to have a clearer picture of who exactly you are speaking to in a particular service, even if that meant having separate services for different audiences? Personally I would still like to see more conversational engagements with congregants during worship, so that we are not so much preached at as preached with, but I recognize that is somewhat a personal preference (albeit with theological underpinnings).

I have been involved in a two-year program created by the Unitarian Universalist Minister's Association (UUMA) called Beyond the Call. As described on the UUMA website,

Beyond the Call (BTC) is a program jointly developed by the UUA and UUMA in 2012 which is designed to provide UUMA members in final fellowship a chance for in-depth study, ongoing collegial reflection and engagement in a critical area of advanced ministerial competence. The first BTC program was on Preaching and the Worship Arts.¹⁰⁹

We will conclude the program in August but the plan is that participants will develop small groups through which we will share the information and experiences we have learned.

¹⁰⁹ Unitarian Universalist Minister's Association, www.uuma.org (May 2014)

Through this program I have deepened my understanding of worship and liturgy. And I have refined my skills in preaching. I have made new friends and developed deeper collegial relationships. This last time I was challenged to go deeper in my sermons. What does it mean to be religious or spiritual in a Unitarian Universalist setting? What does worship look like in a UU setting when the theological diversity is so wide? I continue to explore these questions and to clarify my own theology (which this project helped me do!)

Religious Educator

I have worked as a religious educator as a volunteer or paid staff for about eight years and also as a minister for fourteen years, some of those years overlapping. An aspect of what a religious educator does is to understand the learning process through the lifespan of a person. Religious educators must be able to communicate the ideas of the faith as well as encourage critical thought. Unitarian Universalist religious educators support the journey that each child and adult is on to find their own meaning and truth. Again, with my experience I have some knowledge and ideas in this area. However, the site team could see how the skills for of a religious educator could be utilized and further developed during the course of this project study. And the end result of this project is a book that must be able to be used by lay person and minister alike. Further strengthening my skills in this competency will help in the collection and research aspect of the project and in the developing the final product.

You bring existing strengths to this area. Incorporating worship themes has provided a helpful framework for worship and small group ministry. I suspect our

congregation could stand to revisit UU history, principles, and identify more regularly and systematically. I also think there is remaining work to be done in integrating adult congregants and worship with parents and the RE wing of our church; but the lack of resources in our congregation makes that work more difficult.

We are expanding our ideas of worship and religious education in our congregation. We are exploring congregational religious exploration followed by a multi-generational service. In addition to the congregational work, the website I created is, in my humble opinion, an excellent tool for worship leaders and religious educators. Those colleagues who have looked at the website believe it will be a useful tool and they are also glad that there is room for it to evolve.

CHAPTER 9

LEARNINGS AND FINDINGS

In creating this project, researching and writing this paper and in talking with colleagues and friends about this work I have discovered some insights and things to think and possibly act on further.

- The stories I have put on the webpage are stories of people who have been a part of Unitarian Universalist history. This goes far in connecting us to our history and to developing a sense of pride and identity. But these stories lack metaphor and irony or any sense of transcendence or universality that might make them “religious” stories.

- The stories from our religious heritage, that is, the Judeo-Christian traditions, do offer these things as do many stories from other religious traditions around the world. We need to tell these more often, share them often for they too are the stories of Unitarian Universalism.

- We should create or discover and then incorporate into our worship songs that address the themes of transcendence, hope and love, gratitude, diversity, community, brokenness and wholeness and generosity. We should add these themes to our own UU stories. We need not be tied to facts and dates but to the greater stories these themes suggest.

- We need to continue to sing the hymns of our traditions because they connect us to our past, but we can play with the way we play the music or sing these hymns. We also need to be creating new songs and trying out new styles of music in our worship so we are connecting to all kinds of people in responsive and exciting ways

- I think it is worth further study on the relationship between religious music and society. I found this topic interesting but only shared a fraction of what is to know and learn about this area.

- The website should be a living, growing resource. A book might be a useful tool but might have a limited audience. A website just seems like it could be a useful tool to bringing in new members or at least expanding an understanding of Unitarian Universalism.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

PROJECT PROPOSAL JANUARY 22, 2013

Chapter I Introduction to the Setting

The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield makes its home in Plainfield, New Jersey located in Union County. It is 24 miles southwest of New York City, 18 miles from Newark and 12 miles from Elizabeth. Plainfield is the core city among several surrounding communities like Fanwood, Scotch Plains, Dunellen, Piscataway, South Plainfield, Edison, Metuchen, North Plainfield and Green Brook. Families in the congregation come from all of these towns, as well as others in addition to Plainfield. It is said that as many as 42 communities are represented in our one congregation.

Plainfield was settled in 1684 by Quakers but by the time of its incorporation in 1869 the religious diversity of the town had grown to include Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and others.¹¹⁰ By the late 1880's, this religious diversity grew to include the liberal Unitarians. On July 10, 1889 a formal meeting was held in the free library to establish a Board and to elect trustees for the new Unitarian congregation. Job Male, Plainfield's first mayor, was one of the newly elected trustees. Services were held in his home on Second Place. The Reverend William P. Tilden was the first minister of the new congregation.¹¹¹

On January 13, 1890, the society held its first annual meeting with 44 members on the roll. At a special meeting in February of 1891, the congregation voted to build a stone structure on the current property site on Park Avenue. The architect O.M. Teale designed the building with rusticated stone, multiple windows, turrets and towers placed asymmetrically. The new building was completed in April 1892 and christened All Souls Church a month later. At the dedication, the Rev. Hobart Clark explained that "within its doors all souls, whatever their belief or want of belief, whatever be their worldly

¹¹⁰ <http://www.plainfield.com/history.htm>

¹¹¹ www.fusp.org

circumstance or their spiritual needs, shall find a welcome, a refuge and home.”¹¹² It is now the oldest Unitarian Church in New Jersey.¹¹³

Plainfield’s growth was due in large part to the railroad. Plainfield became a commuter town for New York City with many city dwellers spending their summers and vacations in the “country” and eventually building their homes there. By 1884, the railroad had greatly changed the economy and industries of the city. The grist mill and farm life were replaced by factories that made hats, clothes and carriages. Manufacturing companies of many varieties settled in Plainfield and changed the town further.¹¹⁴

As the town grew, two distinct districts emerged. On the West side of town, low cost housing for lower-income residents sat next to run-down houses, dollar stores and fast-food restaurants. On the Eastside were the wealthier residents with their expansive landscaped yards, their huge maple trees and their homes with as many as ten bedrooms, a ballroom and servant quarters on the multiple floors. The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield sits on the border between both of these districts.

The marked border between the two areas of Plainfield contributed to the race riots in July of 1967. The Plainfield race riots were part of a series of racially-charged episodes that also impacted other cities like Newark, New Jersey. There were violent demonstrations stemming from the anger of the younger, mostly male Black population around education, housing and a lack of jobs. By the end of the week-long disturbances, one white police officer was dead and over 50 Black citizens were injured. Another 100 people were arrested for looting and rioting by the time the National Guard and State police were pulled out of the city.¹¹⁵

In the forty-five years since the riots, it is arguable whether things have improved for the Black population of Plainfield. Unemployment is still high among young Black men, the education system is challenging and even dangerous (ranking Plainfield High School among the top five violent schools in New Jersey), and the gang violence is ranked second in Union county. While Black people have gained more political clout and it is the view of many people that there is little money in the system to make any real difference. As for the White population, there was tremendous White flight following the race riots of the sixties. At the time of the 2010 Census, the racial make-up of Plainfield

¹¹² The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, New Jersey: Pictures with Historical Backgrounds of Memorials and Gifts 1889-1989 (printed for the Centennial Celebration), page 5.

¹¹³ *ibid*

¹¹⁴ <http://westfieldnj.com/whs/history/Counties/UnionCounty/plainfield.htm>

¹¹⁵ <http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/1050584>

is about 23% White, 50% African American, 40% Hispanic with the rest of the population consisting of various other nationalities and races (some races declared in two categories).¹¹⁶ In speaking with Cory Storch, a councilman in Plainfield, he further broke down these numbers From the Census. He said that the White population is more like 9 to 11%, African American 63% and the Hispanic population would cover the remaining 26%. He explains that the discrepancy is in how the Hispanic/Latino population self-identify with some referring to themselves as White or Hispanic or by their country of origin, such as Guatemalan or Columbian.¹¹⁷

The Hispanic or Latino population continues to grow with many of the stores and restaurants in Plainfield serving food from Central or South America and a vast majority of businesses publicizing in both English and Spanish. On the edge of town, Hispanic and Latino day workers line the curbs waiting for a day's work.

While many congregations, families and businesses have left Plainfield over the years, the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield has made a commitment to stay in Plainfield from its very beginning. When Plainfield was a bedroom community of New York, the commitment was not difficult, but this continued commitment to remain in Plainfield has not diminished as the nature and culture of the town has changed.

The Unitarian congregation has been in Plainfield 123 years. Through these years, several themes have appeared repeatedly and quite consistently and continue to be present today. First, it has been important through all the years that the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield be a voice of liberal religion to Plainfield and to the surrounding municipalities. When the congregation was founded, there were several Christian churches in the area, including the Quakers, but no religion espoused a liberal Christian view. The first two services of the congregation were held in the church of the Seventh Day Baptists, but the liberal view of a unity of God rather than a trinity frightened the Baptists and further use of their space was declined. The acceptance of Unitarian ministers into the Plainfield Minister's Association was a long journey but through the hard work of Rev. Alson Robinson it was finally accomplished and deemed successful when he was elected president of the organization in 1943.¹¹⁸ Around this time the congregation was also accepted into the Council of Churches of Plainfield which was dominated by Protestant churches.

¹¹⁶ <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

¹¹⁷ Conversation with Cory Storch, December 4, 2012

¹¹⁸ The first 75 Years: 1889-1964, The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, New Jersey, May 1964, page 8.

In more recent history, though the neighborhood has changed and less and less people in the pews are actually from Plainfield, the congregation remains committed to the Queen City. In part this is due to her historic landmark building, in part it is a sense of obligation to Plainfield and in part it is her member's sense of social justice and service that keeps this congregation here. The vision statement of the congregation speaks to this continued commitment into our future: *Together we seek to grow as a vibrant presence in our community through sharing our welcoming faith and working to build a just world.*

In January, the congregation will meet in small group format to disseminate once again what we mean by the word *community* in our vision statement. Once we have created a consensus around this we will embark on a strategic plan leading, ultimately, to a capital campaign that will support our vision.

The second theme running through our history and into present times is our commitment to social justice. In the early years of the congregation, as ministers arrived and departed, this commitment is not readily apparent; however, because it is a basic tenet of Unitarianism, Universalism, and Unitarian Universalism, it can be implicitly understood that this was part of the very nature of the congregation. In 1920, with the call of Rev. Alson Robinson the work of social justice becomes more visible and explicit. He “wished to know everything, to say everything, to change everything wrong, to exalt everything good and to have the world join him in all of it.”¹¹⁹ His sermons included a series on the leaders of contemporary social movements and also Christianity and Race. He was known to be involved in all aspects of the Plainfield community. When World War II erupted, the church voted to recognize conscientious objectors and provide any necessary protection for them. At the same time, many of the members of the congregation served in the military. At one point, Rev. Robinson was personally corresponding with 90 Unitarian men in the service.¹²⁰

Each subsequent minister at the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield led the congregation in social justice activities, and of course, sometimes the lay leadership in the congregation took the lead roles. The minister after Rev. Robinson was Rev. Mortimer Gesner whose principle concern was “the achievement of love and peace between individuals and within each individual.”¹²¹

It is noted that much of the activities of the congregation mirrored that of the American Unitarian Association and the concerns of the nation at large. By the late 1950's, civil

¹¹⁹ Ibid, page 13.

¹²⁰ Ibid, page 8.

¹²¹ Mitchell, Elizabeth. On the Occasion of the Centennial Celebration of the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, New Jersey, 1989, page 4.

rights and race issues were coming into sharp focus for the congregation. At the annual meeting in 1959, several resolutions were adopted that included that the life of the Civil Rights Commission be extended, that Unitarian churches be urged to achieve full integration, that the congregation be life members of the NAACP, and that the House Committee on Un-American Activities be abolished.¹²²

With the resignation of Rev. Gesner, the church looked for a minister that would continue the enlivened social awareness of the congregation. In 1960, the Rev. Nick Cardell was called to serve the congregation (A side note, Rev. Nick Cardell served a six month prison sentence for trespassing at the School of the America's in 1998- in his seventies!). The congregation continued its involvement with the civil rights movement and added a nuclear sane policy to its agenda. The 60's exploded with social turbulence and the Unitarian society found a vital role to play in Plainfield. In 1964, near the time of the race riots, the following announcement was run in the Courier News: "The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield rejoices in the passage of the Civil rights Bill. As always, we welcome people of all races."¹²³ In addition to race issues, the church was involved with voter registration, protesting police violence, addressing poverty and education issues in Plainfield.

In the 70s, 80s and 90s, the congregation was involved with women's rights, gay and lesbian issues, homelessness, mental health, and anti-war (peace) campaigns. In 1978 the first openly gay minister of the congregation was called. In 1989, the first female minister was called to serve the congregation. The first ministerial intern, a woman, served the congregation in 1985-1986.

Today, social justice issues continue to be a relevant and important aspect of congregational life. The congregation has a food pantry that is open to area residents two Saturdays a month. The last Sunday of the month and several major holidays the members of the congregation serve over 200 hot meals to hungry or homeless people in the community. Project Hope partners with several churches and other organizations to address teen violence and gang membership. Members work with El Centro and Angels in Action to serve the needs of the Hispanic/Latino and immigrant populations of Plainfield. Several adult programs and lifespan religious education opportunities are focused on immigration issues. The church has ongoing relationships with HomeFirst (an organization that seeks to find homes for the homeless of Union County), the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and many local organizations in Plainfield that work to improve the lives of Plainfield citizens. In addition to these programs and ministries, we have a budding new mental

¹²² Ibid, page 6.

¹²³ Ibid, page 9

health ministry in partnership with Bridgeway, an organization that works with those who suffer with or have recovered from mental illness.

The third theme is that of a struggle with finances. This appears at the very beginning of the organization of the church when it was voted that the cost of building a stone structure could not exceed \$12,500. In order to accomplish this, the builders had to “cut all building and interior items to the barest necessities.”¹²⁴ Repeatedly and annually the theme of a budget shortfall or lack of funds is reported in the minutes of congregational meetings. At least twice, the ministers were asked to accept less money in salary for the next budget year. Some years were more prosperous than others allowing for additions to the building to be constructed but nevertheless, the constant concern for upkeep and maintenance has been a recurring issue. The scarcity mentality of the congregation has led to very tight budgets year after year. The cutbacks and austerity measures provoked by a lack of rentals or less than anticipated pledges or low membership continue to the present day. Our conversations today consist of questions like how can we do social justice in the community when our building takes up much of our capital? Can we maintain an historic building with only 175 adult members? A scarcity mentality and a lack of clarity around increasing our income is the dominating paradigm in the congregation thus hindering living our vision, growing our community and being a vital presence in Plainfield.

The final theme is that of commitment to the church community itself which includes the adult members and the children and youth as well as the programs and ministries of the congregation. With the waxing and waning membership in her 123 years of existence, so, too, the programs and ministries have waxed and waned. Yet even with cash flow issues and some short minister tenures there have always been vital programs to serve the various needs of the congregants. In 1889, the Women’s Church House Society (a forerunner to the present day Women’s Alliance) was organized.¹²⁵ It is the oldest, continuing ministry in the history of the congregation. From their inception to today, this women’s group has contributed to the health and vitality of the congregation. They have helped with budgetary shortfalls; they bought and later refurbished the organ, they paid for the remodeling of the kitchen, and on and on. Today the Women’s Alliance continues to enrich the lives of the women members through interesting and diverse programs and support of the Green Sanctuary movement, the fair trade coffee table, and scholarships for young women going to college. Other ministries have existed over the years to support the different constituencies in the congregation such as the Men’s Group, groups

¹²⁴ The first 75 Years: 1889-1964, The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, New Jersey, May 1964, page 3.

¹²⁵ Ibid, page 2.

for young adults, small group ministry, Parish Players, the Arts committee, and various discussion groups.

The Religious Education Program has been another ongoing ministry of the congregation almost since its inception. The RE program provides instruction to kindergarten through thirteen year olds. A youth group offers educational and service opportunities for teenagers. There are four outstanding religious education programs for participants in the program in addition to various curricula that might vary from year to year. These are Our Whole Lives Lifespan Sexuality Curriculum (all ages), the Coming of Age Program (eighth graders), Age of Reason (third graders), and Neighboring Faiths (sixth and seventh graders). Children in the RE program know they are valued members of the congregation and every effort is made to help them understand in their minds and hearts that they are part of and responsible to the church community.

One last thing to mention that conveys a commitment to our congregational community is our devotion to our historic building. The records show a not so unusual struggle throughout our history of having enough money to expand the building (several times) to not having enough money to fix the roof or upgrade the bathrooms or fire alarm system. This fiscal fluctuation has led to an historic building in constant need of repair and maintenance but at the same time conveys a dedication to keeping this historic building (and thus a liberal religious voice) in the Plainfield community. For the last several years, we have been undergoing a renovation project that has restored some of the original beauty of the building. The two porches and roof have been repaired, the kitchen has been partially upgraded and a lift has been added to the building to make it more accessible. People are dedicated to our building which is a New Jersey and a National Historic Landmark and, by extension, to the community of Unitarian Universalists (and others) who meet to use our space.

The history of the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield mirrors the significant social aspects of the Unitarian Universalist Association to which the Society belongs. Unitarian Universalists have always been socially conscious and, in fact, have been instrumental in many social justice issues from abolition to getting the women the vote, from affirmative action to ending poverty, from marriage equality to immigration reform. The causes we take up are always in defense of the inherent worth and dignity for each person and support the other principles of our faith. These principles are:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The theological diversity present in the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield is also reflected in the greater Unitarian Universalist Association. From the minutes and histories written about the congregation it is not clear the theological evolution of a congregation that was once called All Souls and is now referred to as the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield. Today, the spectrum of theologies in society is reflected in the congregation. That is to say, we do not have a dogma or creed so our congregations are rather diverse theologically. While many Unitarian Universalists might describe themselves as agnostic or atheist (generally about 46%), there are also people who would describe themselves as spiritual or theists. In fact, most people coming into the congregation today are more spiritual than those who were coming into the congregation thirty years ago. There has been a real shift in the last decade over language and reverence and spirituality that has created a wider space for theological diversity in our congregations but has also created more opportunities and challenges for conversation and growth.

For a fuller history on Unitarian Universalism, see Appendices A and B.

Challenge Statement

As the minister of the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield in Plainfield, New Jersey, and a leader in our congregations for twenty years, it is apparent to me that Unitarian Universalists struggle with our identity because we embrace many faith traditions and religious beliefs. If we cannot express our identity, we risk losing current members and youth or not bringing in new members. Reduced numbers results in irrelevance in our changing world. This demonstration project aims to create an educational process that affirms and strengthens our understanding of who we are and further instills a Unitarian Universalist identity for those who gather for worship, community and service.

Chapter 2

Preliminary Analysis

In 2011, the Unitarian Universalists celebrated fifty years as an association, the Unitarians and the Universalists having merged in May of 1961. This anniversary had us celebrating our past as well as looking towards our future. In the 2011 winter edition of the UU World magazine the cover article called *Faith in our Future: What do we need to meet the challenges of our time?* had six prominent Unitarian Universalist ministers share their thoughts on the future of our faith. These presentations were from the 2011 Minns Lecture series moderated by the Rev. Larry Peers. In his opening remarks, he asked, “How big is our faith? How big is our faith to hold and heal ourselves, to grapple with the emerging twenty-first century? How big is our faith to propel us in directions that are truly liberating for human souls and human peoples?”¹²⁶

Even though membership in mainline churches seems to be on the decline and the number of people identifying as “nones” is growing, those people who claim to be spiritual is rising. The number of people who are looking for something through self help books, meditation and yoga is on the rise. This puts Unitarian Universalism in a unique position. As Christine Robinson, one of the ministers in the article asks, “If we don’t serve their needs for depth, heart, spirituality, hope, faith, and love outside of an orthodox setting, who will?”

Two influential and important theologians describe Unitarian Universalism as truly relevant for the 21st century. Rev. Dr. Kay Northcutt, a minister in Tulsa, Ok, said: “You are lifesavers. You are mosaic makers called to put together broken bit by bit—creating patterns of beauty and meaning out of pain and loss. You are bone carriers, like the Israelites, who lifted the bones of their ancestors and took them out across the desert. Bones are heavy things, but what you inherit from those who come before is rich, so make sure you carry them with you.” “You are the hope of the world.”¹²⁷

Diana Eck, the Harvard Divinity School Professor and Scholar said at the Installation of Galen Guengerich a couple of years ago:

“If there ever were a time that we need to spin out a new fabric of belonging and a wider sense of “we” for the human community, it is certainly now.... Developing a consciousness of our growing religious inter-relatedness, developing a moral compass that will give us guidance in the years ahead—these are certainly among the most important tasks of our time...you have a theological orientation toward the oneness and mystery of God that is essential for the world of religious difference in which we live... You are, in my estimation, the church of the new millennium. In this era, Unitarian Universalism is not the lowest common denominator, but the highest common calling... In a world divided by race and by religion and ideology, the very presence of a church

¹²⁶ UUWorld; Winter 2011: “Faith in Our Future,” page 25.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

like this, committed to the oneness of God, the love of God, the love of neighbor and service to humanity is a beacon. The Unitarian theology, and yes you have one, does not reduce the mystery of the divine, the transcendent, but amplifies it, broadens it to include the investigation of the many, many ways in which the divine is known and yet unknown... You do have a mission. The world is in need of your theology.”¹²⁸

In order to survive as a religion, as a great faith, with all the potential and possibility that are in these great words from these women of different faiths, there are some things we need to address. There are numerous things we can do to be the faith of the twenty-first century but this project proposes to address just one, otherwise the project would be too big (a cathedral rather than a stone) and, perhaps, never ending.

Unitarian Universalism has no theological creed or dogma. Our congregations consist of a diverse group of people with a wide ranging set of beliefs when it comes to questions of a theological nature. We are a community of congregations in covenant with each other to affirm and promote our Unitarian Universalists principles. But these principles cannot substitute for a theology. Traditional theological belief (Is there one God? Is there one sacred scripture?) need not be the binding force in a congregation of the 21st century. What is required and possible in a modern church is a wider, more expansive theological discussion (What is my purpose? To whom do I belong? How shall we be towards each other and the earth?) . These other kinds of conversations lead to a discussion of what then are the other things that bind us together as an association of congregations? How do we identify these and integrate them into the Unitarian Universalist identity?

If we cannot understand how we develop a Unitarian Universalist identity that is also the connecting fiber from Unitarian to Unitarian we risk declining in membership and becoming obsolete in a world where religion is on a slow but steady descent into irrelevance. We must embrace our congregations as places where God’s love is universal, as places where the deepest needs of the spirit can be met and where community means service to all of humanity.

Two major ways identity is determined and integrated is through story and song. Stories and songs play a powerful role in determining or shaping who we are, what we value, where we come from, what we dream and hope for in the future. They connect us to our past and help us determine our future. They explain things and help us understand.

This project is an educational tool that will identify the main areas of Unitarian Universalist identity that may be spoken or not that binds one to the other. These identity factors will be translated into story and song in a book that can be used in worship and/or in religious education settings.

Through this project and the product that it produces I hope to help Unitarian Universalists claim a wider identity than, say, just the principles or “a church with no creed.” Further, my goal is to widen and expand the conversation so that the

¹²⁸ <http://infidelity.blogsome.com/2010/09/29/diana-eck-on-unitarian-universalism/>

understanding of what it means to be Unitarian Universalist goes deeper than the principles but also produces a modern theology that is expansive and inclusive for all those seekers out there, a theology that helps Unitarian Universalism be a church for the new millennium. A theological framework that would help Unitarian Universalists claim their identity and answer the questions Rev. Larry Peers so presciently asked: How big is our faith to hold and heal ourselves, to grapple with the emerging twenty-first century? How big is our faith to propel us in directions that are truly liberating for human souls and human peoples?”¹²⁹

Chapter 3

¹²⁹ UUWorld; Winter 2011: “Faith in Our Future,” page 25.

Plan of Implementation

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Identify unifying elements or characteristics of Unitarian Universalist and Unitarian Universalism that are unspoken or taken for granted and are not necessarily institutionally “named.”

Strategy 1: Examine the various works of Unitarian Universalists to determine any recognizable themes, including written works, presentations, historical and current.

Strategy 2: Create a survey tool to elicit ideas from both ministers and lay people as to “unnamed” characteristics of Unitarian Universalists that help create the UU identity.

Strategy 3: Collect data and analyze to create a list of four or five identity elements or characteristics of Unitarian Universalists.

Evaluation of Goal 1: The results of the survey as well as a compilation of the data collected.

Completion date: March 31, 2013 (Sprowls-Jenks)

Goal 2: Compile a library of stories that speak to these elements and characteristics.

Strategy 1: Examine already published stories in various UU resources.

Strategy 2: Talk with colleagues, worship leaders, and Religious Educators about their resources and stories they have written.

Strategy 3: Explore and collect stories from other traditions that speak to the identities developed in Goal 1.

Evaluation of Goal 2: A compilation of stories will be created.

Completion date: May 31, 2013

Goal 3: Compile a library of songs that speak to these elements and characteristics

Strategy 1: Examine already published songs in various UU resources.

Strategy 2: Talk with colleagues, worship leaders, musicians, ministers of music, and Religious Educators about their musical resources and any songs they have written.

Strategy 3: Explore and collect songs from other traditions that speak to the identities developed in Goal 1.

Evaluation of Goal 3: A compilation of songs will be created.

Completion date: May 31, 2013

Goal 4: Create a book or manual of select stories and songs that can be used in worship

Strategy 1: Examine the materials collected and compile them based on the four or five identity characteristics previously identified.

Strategy 2: Determine the number of stories to include in the book in full text and which ones should be supplied as a resource appendix list

Strategy 3: Determine the number of songs to include in the book in full text and which ones should be supplied as a resource appendix list

Strategy 4: Talk with the Unitarian Universalist Association and the UU publishers to determine interest in publishing this kind of worship manual/resource or self publish if there is no interest.

Evaluation Goal 4: A book or manual of stories and songs based on the unifying characteristics of Unitarian Universalism that have traditionally been unnamed but that will help us claim a theology and faith for the 21st century. To be used in any congregation.

Completion date of book: July 2013

Chapter 4

Research Questions

Theological

Is there a need for a unifying theology for Unitarian Universalism in the 21st century?

Unitarian Universalists do not have a set creed or dogma. We have seven principles that all congregations covenant to affirm and promote. Our congregations are very diverse when it comes to theology with a wide range of beliefs from a belief in God to atheism and nearly everything (it seems) in between. Yet, like with many protestant denominations, are numbers are in decline. One aim of this project is to determine if there is an overarching theology that binds us together in a way that the seven principles do and will this theology help us be the religion for a new millennium.

Biblical

What is the role of music in faith formation in the Bible?

Unitarian Universalism is not a Biblical based religion although its roots are grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition and there are still some churches today that are much more Christian than the denomination as a whole. However, a study of music in the Bible as a means for faith formation would have value. One aspect of this is to view Israel as a tribe and also as a “church.” A study of how Israel maintained her identity even in exile through a study of the psalms (in particular 137) may offer some insights into faith formation.

Because Unitarian Universalism can draw from many sources (see Appendix C) a more extensive search through various sacred texts will be used to answer the question of the role of music in faith formation.

Sociological

How do people develop a religious identity?

Certain people identify as Christian or Jewish or Muslim. Some people identify themselves as spiritual but not religious. Others identify as practicing Buddhism or an earth-centered tradition. In Unitarian Universalism, one can identify as any of the above as well as a Unitarian Universalist. Others are not affiliated with any religious organization and consider themselves “nones.” This project takes a look at how the music and stories of our faith traditions might help shape a religious identity. Because our congregations have as a goal to be more ethnically diverse, to embrace

multiculturalism, and to work against oppression these will be taken into consideration in the exploration of religious identity development in Unitarian Universalism.

Spiritual Life and Practice

In what way do the practices, rituals, and traditions in Unitarian Universalist worship help to create or prevent the development of Unitarian Universalist identity?

That there are such diverse beliefs in our Unitarian Universalist congregations can be both a blessing and a challenge. Large numbers of people in our congregations would describe themselves as humanists or atheists. Sometimes their dislike of certain religious words can get in the way of being accepting of those people who come to our congregations in search of a deeper connection to God or who have an interest in developing a richer spiritual life. There is a certain level of maturity required to be a member of a congregation where your personal religious beliefs may not be shared by the person sitting next to you in the pew. Our rituals and practices need to be wide enough to reach everyone and yet have depth in ways that feeds the mind of the atheist and the soul of the seeker. This project will examine some of the practices, rituals and traditions found in our worship that encourages or strengthens a Unitarian Universalist identity that transcends individual beliefs and may even suggest some new ones.

Chapter 5

Evaluation Process

Method of Evaluation 1

In February and March, a survey will be created to collect data from colleagues. I will rely on a survey tool such as SurveyMonkey and personal interviews to collect this data. Data will be stored online and created into a document accessible to the participants and to the site team through Google documents. Completion of the survey and storage of the document online will be an indicator of the completion of the task. Those interested can access the data and determine its content and value.

Method of Evaluation 2 and 3

During the months of February, March, April and May I will be talking with colleagues and others to collect their stories and musical resources. I will be examining works already published and determining if I will need to write some of my own stories or songs. All of this data will be stored online in a Google documents file which will be accessible to any interested parties. The process is complete once a significant number of stories and songs have been compiled and collected online.

Method of Evaluation 4

Finally, the end product of the collection of the data above is the compilation of songs and stories in a book or manual usable in worship or religious education. I am hoping to also include a mp3 or cd of various songs that worship leaders and ministers could use in their congregations.

Chapter 6

Ministerial Competencies

Theologian

A minister serving in a congregation has got to be a theologian. Ministers must be able to act as interpreters of events that happen in the lives of our congregants be that at the personal, familial, community or world level. Ministers must also be able to interpret and explain the doctrines (explicit and implicit) that define the faith of the congregation. They act as comforters in crisis but also as provocateurs for justice. All of this is the role of a minister as a theologian. My site team agrees that I have some level of competency as a theologian *in praxis*. However, a considerable aspect of this project is to actually give some thought and shape to an overarching theology of Unitarian Universalism—to actually put a name to something we are part of but not naming as well as giving some shape to a theology that will help shape a faith for the 21st century.

Preacher

A minister in a congregation has many roles with the most visible and central being that of preacher. In Unitarian Universalism there is no set liturgy or sacred text we use but, instead, have all the world's sacred and secular texts to choose from. This can be freeing in some ways and yet overwhelming in others. A lot of pressure is put on the minister to be able to inspire or intellectually stimulate or challenge or move each person in the pew. When the congregation has a diversity of views, this can be challenging. Further, the minister simply must be a great speaker and story teller weaving the fibers of thought and emotion into a beautiful tapestry that appeals to all. As a minister for fourteen years, I have been preaching weekly and steadily for eight of these having spent six years as an associate minister with irregular preaching opportunities. I am always trying to improve myself in this regard. It is the opinion of the site team that there is room for improvement in this area of ministry as well.

I have been accepted into a program created by the UU Minister's Association to work with a small group of ministers to further their preaching and worship skills. It is a two year program designed to take good preachers and help them become great. This program will be my major endeavor in addressing this competency.

Religious Educator

I have worked as a religious educator as a volunteer or paid staff for about eight years and also as a minister for fourteen years, some of those years overlapping. An aspect of what a religious educator does is to understand the learning process through the lifespan of a person. Religious educators must be able to communicate the ideas of the faith as well as encourage critical thought. Unitarian Universalist religious educators support the journey that each child and adult is on to find their own meaning and truth. Again, with my experience I have some knowledge and ideas in this area. However, the site team could see how the skills for of a religious educator could be utilized and further

developed during the course of this project study. And the end result of this project is a book that must be able to be used by lay person and minister alike. Further strengthening my skills in this competency will help in the collection and research aspect of the project and in the developing the final product.

Witness or Evangelist

Once a theology or identity is made more clear through the work of this project, one must be able to articulate and communicate this effectively to not only people who are already Unitarian Universalist but to those who may be seeking a religion such as this. The site team feels clear communication of the over-arching unifying message of Unitarian Universalism is an important aspect of this project. This is probably the area of greatest challenge for me as it requires a confidence that is weak and limiting. I will rely on the site team heavily here to encourage and support me in the work of the project and then sharing the results to a wider audience.

APPENDIX B

A HISTORY OF UNITARIANISM, UNIVERSALISM AND UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Unitarian History:

Unitarian Universalism is the result of the merger of two separate denominations: Unitarianism and Universalism.

Originally, all Unitarians were Christians who did not believe in the Holy Trinity of God (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). Instead, they believed in the unity, or single aspect, of God. Although people have held Unitarian beliefs since the time of Jesus' death, religious groups did not form around these ideas until the mid-1500s in Transylvania and the 1600s in England. Religious authorities at this time saw early Unitarians as heretics and often persecuted them. Important figures from this period include John Biddle, Francis David, Michael Servetus, King John Sigismund and Faustus Socinus.

Unitarianism emerged in America in the early 19th century, stressing importance of rational thinking, each person's direct relationship with God, and the humanity of Jesus. By 1825, Unitarian ministers had formed a denomination called the American Unitarian Association. Members spoke out on issues such as education reform, prison reform, moderation in temperance, ministry to the poor, and the abolition of slavery.

Influential Unitarians from this era include William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, Joseph Priestley, and Thomas Starr King, who was also a Universalist.

American Unitarianism went through many changes over the next 150 years, from the introduction of transcendentalist thought in the mid-1800s and humanist thought in the early 1930s. These contributed to the evolution of American Unitarianism into a more broad and flexible faith.

Unitarians have been very influential throughout American history, especially in politics and literature. Some famous Unitarians include John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Paul Revere, William Howard Taft, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

After growing increasingly theologically and ethically close, the Unitarian and Universalist denominations consolidated in 1961 to form the new religion of Unitarian Universalism. Although Unitarian Universalism no longer solely holds traditional Unitarian or Universalist beliefs, it does draw directly on its heritage for much of its inspiration and grounding.

There are many Unitarian congregations today outside America that are part of the Unitarian Universalist community. The largest concentrations are in Transylvania (now part of Romania and Hungary) and India.

Universalist History:

Unitarian Universalism emerged from two separate denominations: Unitarianism and Universalism.

Universalists are Christians who believe in universal salvation, meaning that all people will eventually be reconciled with God. While people have held Universalist beliefs for thousands of years, the faith did not become a widespread religious movement until English Universalists came to America in the late 1700s to escape religious persecution.

Because of its loving and inclusive doctrine, Universalism quickly became popular in America and the Universalist Church of America was formed in 1793.

Important Universalist figures of this period include Hosea Ballou, John Murray, and Benjamin Rush.

Universalists were best known for supporting education and non-sectarian schools, but they also worked on social issues including the separation of church and state, prison reform, capital punishment, the abolition of slavery, and women's rights. In 1863, the Universalists became the first group in the United States to ordain a woman, Olympia Brown, with full denominational authority.

Important Universalists of this period include Clara Barton, Thomas Starr King (also a Unitarian), Horace Greeley, George Pullman, and Mary Livermore.

The Universalist faith declined after the Civil War, as many Universalist churches were destroyed and many Universalist ministers who had served as army chaplains were killed. As the concept of damnation became less central to many American religious groups, the Universalist faith seemed less unique in its teachings and its membership waned.

There are some Universalist congregations today outside America that are part of the Unitarian Universalist community. The largest concentration of Universalists abroad is in the Philippines.

Unitarian Universalist History:

Since 1961, Unitarian Universalism has nurtured its [Unitarian](#) and [Universalist](#) heritages by continuing to provide a strong voice for social justice and liberal religion. Right after the formation of the new denomination, Unitarian Universalists (UUs) nationwide

advocated for the rights of conscientious objectors during the war in Vietnam as well as for voting and civil rights for [people of color](#) in the American South.

In the 1970s, Unitarian Universalists supported the rights of gay and lesbian people and published the Pentagon Papers.

Unitarian Universalists have also worked to address inequities in the treatment of women and to combat racism and oppression within our faith movement. In 2001, there were more female Unitarian Universalist ministers than male ministers and Unitarian Universalists continue to encourage [women's leadership](#) in our congregations and larger community.

Unitarian Universalists support full equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and have made a strong commitment to fight for marriage equality in every state in America.

Some famous modern-day Unitarian Universalists include Tim Berners-Lee, Melissa Harris-Perry, Christopher Reeve, May Sarton, Randy Pausch, Pete Seeger, Joanne Woodward, and Kurt Vonnegut.

Unitarian Universalist theology has continued to evolve since the merger. We have explored the changing role of [Christianity](#) in today's Unitarian Universalism, acknowledged the [sources](#) of our faith, included in those sources [earth-based spirituality](#), and explored what religious and spiritual language works best in our congregations.

From: <http://www.uua.org/beliefs/history/index.shtml>

APPENDIX C

OUR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST HISTORY: A SERMON BY REV.

JANE RZEPKA

Our first notable ancestor was an Alexandrian named Origen. It was the early Third Century, when Christians were persecuted. Origen, at age seventeen, his father imprisoned and then killed as a Christian, was willing to accept martyrdom himself for his religious faith. But his mother thwarted his plan of leaving home and risking his life by hiding all his clothes. Origen went on to become a dedicated scholar, devoting himself single-mindedly to the pursuit of Christian truth through the use of reason. The more he studied the Bible, the more he began to doubt the usual notion of the existence of heaven and hell. Origen believed that everyone, not just Christians, not just “good” people, would find redemption. It was the “ultimate reconciliation of all souls with God,” it was “universal salvation,” it was “universalism.” Origen’s writings were eventually condemned as heretical, but Universalism lived on as a thread in our liberal history.

Another Alexandrian, a century later, was the first to champion the simplicity of God and the humanity of Jesus: Arius. The creed recited in many Christian churches today affirming Trinitarian doctrine and Christology was created to counteract the teachings of Arius!

And then there was Pelagius, the Fourth Century English monk. At a time when Augustine insisted on the total depravity of human nature, Pelagius, bless him, courageously advocated moral free will and spiritual liberty. Pelagius was well-respected at the time, and while Augustine clearly had the upper hand, Pelagius posed a real threat to the Church’s doctrine of innate corruption. There is no doubt that Augustine won the

debate. But again, a thread of faith has persisted: we have the ability to choose good over evil. We have Pelagius to thank for that theological position.

A big jump now to the Reformation, where our hero is a Spaniard named Michael Servetus. I have mixed feelings about Servetus. Here we have a nineteen-year-old kid who takes on both the Catholic and Protestant authorities. They believe in the Trinity; and Servetus says, and I quote, “Your Trinity is a product of subtlety and madness. The Gospel knows nothing of it.” He was brilliant and intemperate. He infuriated the Inquisitors as well as Calvin. They gave him chance after chance to moderate his views, but he insulted them repeatedly, until, finally, Calvin had Servetus burned at the stake. Personally, I wish Servetus had seen fit to proceed with a little more caution and save himself. He did clearly prove there is no Trinity taught in the Bible, and that was important for a new theology. But I wonder, had he lived, where his theology would have taken him—and us.

Now to Poland and Transylvania, the cradle of European Unitarianism. Sixteenth Century. Faustus Socinus. Socinus was the trusted theologian in a group of non-Trinitarian liberal congregations in Poland devoted to religious liberty, reason, and tolerance. The movement spread rapidly, attracting many of the most enlightened and gifted minds of that age. But they were persecuted—the “Socinian heresy” was stomped on, and Socinus himself was attacked in the streets of Krakow, his mouth filled with mud and his face smeared. Eventually, broken by the attacks, he died. Meanwhile, over in Transylvania, having adopted the Unitarian views of his court preacher, Ferenc Dávid (Francis David), the Unitarian king John Sigismund declared the first edict of religious toleration in 1568. You’ve heard the phrase, “We need not think alike to love alike”?

That was Ferenc Dávid. In Transylvania, liberal congregations survived and continue to survive over 400 years later as Unitarian churches.

England. Eighteenth Century. Religious liberals here knew about Socinianism: they advocated Socinian tolerance of differences in belief, they applied the Socinian test of reason to religious doctrines, and preached the Socinian concept that Jesus was simply a man. Here we come upon Joseph Priestley, discoverer of oxygen, Unitarian minister, and espouser of a number of liberal and unpopular causes, including the French Revolution. Priestley gave intellectual brilliance to the development of Unitarian religion and stimulated a mushrooming of Unitarian institutions. But established church leaders became exasperated, and they inflamed a mob. Priestley's home, laboratory, library, and Unitarian chapel were attacked and burned. He escaped by the skin of his teeth and, tempted by an invitation from his friend Thomas Jefferson, sailed to the United States in 1794, bringing his Unitarianism with him.



John Murray. The late 1700s. Another Englishman, a Universalist. Murray's life in England had begun to fall apart. His only child died, and then his wife, followed by his three sisters and his mother. He lost his job and landed in debtor's prison. When he got out, he resolved to go to America to seek a new life. John Murray did just that, and wound up on a ship that was eventually grounded on a sandbar off the coast of New Jersey. While the ship's crew waited for a fair wind and a high tide to move them along, Murray went ashore, where he met a farmer—Thomas Potter. It so happens that this Thomas Potter had built a chapel nearby, and was just waiting for a preacher who

believed in universal salvation to appear on the scene. Potter became convinced that God had sent John Murray to preach in his chapel. Murray, however, was not at all convinced. Potter said, “The wind will never change, sir, until you preach for us.” And Murray’s ship remained stuck until Sunday, when Murray began his preaching career, bringing Universalism to the colonies.

It was a religion that praised God and preached a loving theology of inclusivity in heaven and also here on earth. Therefore, Universalists devoted themselves to prison reform, building schools, temperance, pacifism, and women’s rights (ordaining Olympia Brown to the Universalist ministry in 1863). We now have Unitarianism and Universalism on the American continent. It is the early Nineteenth Century, and Calvinist orthodoxy, straight from the Puritans, is the status quo. Universalists, with their universal salvation, offered relief from the Calvinist notion of damnation. Hosea Ballou became the Universalist’s greatest leader through his public speaking and publications, spreading the seeds that Murray had sown.

Unitarian-oriented clergy began more and more to sit up and take notice of Calvinistic pessimism about human nature. The prevailing theology in the culture forced religious liberals to come to grips with their own theologies of human free will, dignity, and rationality. William Ellery Channing confirmed the presence of the new theological movement, and rallied the liberals together as a theological group. By the third decade of the Nineteenth Century, many of the Puritan Congregational churches began to call themselves Unitarian.

Every generation of American Unitarians has questioned the religion they inherited. Almost as soon as American Unitarianism was established, a young generation

of Transcendentalists—Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker among them—changed the liberal religious orientation from one of empiricism and historicism to a religion of direct intuition. Unitarianism drifted away from belief in Biblical revelation and the sole inspiration of Jesus.

The Universalists did retain the Christian basis of their faith more completely. But they, too, changed over the years, and by the early decades of the Twentieth Century, Universalism emphasized the notion that evil is the result of “unjust social and economic conditions.” Universalism, according to reformer Clarence Skinner, was economic and social as well as spiritual.

The generations continued, and our religion continued to evolve. The rise of the Humanist movement among the Unitarians was an attempt to reformulate liberal theology on non-theistic grounds. Universalists moved from their longstanding emphasis on universal salvation to an understanding of Universalism as universal religion—“boundless in scope, as broad as humanity, as infinite as the universe.”

By mid-century, the leadership of both Unitarianism and Universalism recognized the advantages of combining efforts through consolidation. The proposed merger was controversial for both Unitarians and Universalists, each quite naturally fearing a loss of tradition and identity. But finally, in 1961, the plan was overwhelmingly ratified by the individual congregations and then by the American Unitarian Association Annual Meeting and the Universalist General Assembly.

Generation after generation, Unitarian Universalists continue to examine the

religion, reshape it, persist in it, and find joy in it. Frederick May Eliot, president of the American Unitarian Association from 1937-1958, said,

One of the most interesting aspects of our history is the process by which the radicals of one generation have come to be regarded as ‘100% Unitarians’ by succeeding generations. The truth of the matter is that we are a church in which growth is not only permitted but encouraged—growth in thought, growth in sensitiveness to moral values, growth in courage to put religion to work in the world.

My colleague Jack Mendelsohn offers us this benediction (adapted):

We have inherited quite a religion.

It is lived. It is not just a set of bromides and pietisms. It is a serious effort to conduct life according to principles and ideals.

It is emotional, heart-swelling. It is even naive. In spite of uncertainty, it does not rule out leaps of faith.

It is free, not bound by tradition, inheritance, geography, nor the passing parade.

It is first-hand, a personal experience.

It is responsible. It does not try to escape the consequences of decision.

It is growing. It never thinks of itself as perfected and final.

It embraces humility, recognizing that faith is not certainty where there is in fact

mystery.

It is compassionate. It understands that religions universally wrap their essence in myth. It reaches to grasp and appreciate the truths bound up in the myths of other believers.

It is tough on its possessors, committing them to sacrifice, but it is tender toward those who disagree.

It is social, struggling to realize its own vision at community, national and world levels.

It is radiant, blessing its possessor with courage, serenity and zest.

This is our history, and also our hope.

APPENDIX D

SINGING OURSELVES INTO BEING

PNWD UUMA Chapter Worship

October 22, 2012

Mark D. Morrison-Reed

Chalice Light

Somewhere in Berkeley and in Boston and in Bujimbara,
someone lights a chalice, and its light shines on freedom;
Somewhere in Kansas City and in Koloszar and in Kampala,
someone lights a chalice, and its light illumines truth;
Somewhere in Tierra del Fuego, and in Tulsa, and in Honolulu and in Havana,
and in Nashville and in Nantucket and in Nairobi,
Someone lights a chalice, and love is made visible.
[This morning in the Palisades], we light this chalice and hold in memory,
the many chalices whose steady flames hold us.

Rosemary Bray McNatt

Opening Words

Come into the circle of love and justice,
Come into the [fellowship] of pity, of holiness and health,-
Come, and ye shall know peace and joy.

Israel Zangwill

Beginning with a hymn written in 1861 join me in an exploration of UU hymnody and
how it mirrors who we were, are and are becoming.

The Battle Hymn of the Republic

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;

He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:

Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!

Our God is marching on.

(Chorus)

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,

With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:

As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,

While God is marching on.

(Chorus)

Reflecting on this song in 1971 Dana MacLean Greeley wrote: "...at the Washington March in 1963 when Martin Luther King himself made the famous 'I Have a Dream' speech. Many Negro spiritual and other songs were sung, and of course "The Battle Hymn of the Republic: Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord," which was one of King's favorites. I thought again, as many times before – when we used it at my father's funeral, when it was used at John Kennedy's funeral, when I wanted so frequently to use it myself – what a shame it was that our Hymnbook Commission left it out of the new hymnbook. Even the earlier commission, in 1937, put it in the back [567 was also almost the last] of the book in a sort of inferior class – this hymn that was good enough for Winston Churchill and the Kennedys, and that was written by the devoted Unitarian Julia Ward Howe, at the suggestion incidentally of her minister, James Freeman Clarke." (*25 Beacon Street and Other Recollection*, p.122)

Both Howe and Clarke were Abolitionist and the hymnal commissions to which Dana Greeley referred are those that compiled *Hymns of the Spirit*, published in 1937,

and *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*, published in 1964. Between those hymnals, Vincent Silliman edited *We Sing of Life*. Published by the Ethical Culture Societies in 1955, it was widely used in our children's programs. Among its songs were two African-American Spirituals: "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" and "Go Down Moses."

When Israel Was in Egypt's Land

When Israel was in Egypt's land, Let My people go;
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, Let My people go;
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

The Lord told Moses what to do, Let My people go;
To lead the children of Israel through, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

Oh, let us all from bondage flee, Let My people go;
And let us all in Christ be free, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go

Join me in reciting Unison Affirmation [#501 from HCL]

The Center of All Days, All Races

I know that the past was great and the future will be great,
And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time,
And that where I am, or you are, this present day, there is the center of all days, all races,
And there is the meaning, to us, of all that ever has come of races and days, or ever will come.

Walt Whitman

This affirmation is from *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*. Published in 1964, it made sense to consummate the consolidation of Universalism and Unitarianism with a new hymnal. Worship, after all, is at the core of our communal life, the time and place where and when we join together. In the mid-1960s in the midst of the civil rights era you would expect the hymnal to address racial justice. The chair of the commission was Rev.

Arthur Foote, the minister at Unity in St. Paul. He was a member of the local NAACP and Urban League, and had been a member of the Unitarian Commission on Intergroup Relations from 1952 – 1954, there he worked with the renowned Howard Thurman, mystic, African-American minister and prolific writer. Another member, Christopher Moore, in 1956 had founded a children's choir at the First Unitarian Society of Chicago that was interracial from the beginning and sang a multicultural repertoire. I know, I was there; its second African-American child. There was Kenneth Patton. In 1947 Patton, on a radio show in Madison, Wisconsin, resigned from the white race. It made headlines. Later he traveled around Chicago with a major magazine testing to see whether he and a black companion would be served, or if alone what would happen if announced he was black. Later he wrote: "...I begin to see that no "white" man can know what it is like to be one of a marked group. He cannot experience a life-time of frustration [and] blocked hopes and ambitions... But I was coming as close to an inside glimpse as any of my group could...I have 'crossed the line' through a deeply emotional experience and I have no desire to cross back." That commission met summers at Vincent Silliman's home in Maine. Silliman, who as much as anyone shaped the hymnody of the Unitarian Universalist during the middle of the 20th century, had included the two spirituals in *We Sing of Life*.

Given their commitment and relationship to black culture these ministers, given it is the 60s and that our espoused values supporting integration, desegregation and African independence, had been articulated in General Resolutions, you would expect to find material by and about African Americans and racial justice in *Hymn for the Celebration of Life*. There is none. Not one reading; not one spiritual - nothing. Because Patton was interested in world religion you find Tagore and Lao-Tzu, Kibran and Gandhi but nothing by African Americans.

A year after the hymnal was published came Selma. At one point as they were singing in Brown Chapel Dana's Greeley's assistant, Irene Murdock, recounts, " ...for fifteen minutes or more we sang nothing but 'amen'. [Sing Amen]The 'amens' somehow expressed our need to go beyond words. I remember Dana Greeley remarking rather sadly that the previous year the Hymnbook Commission had voted to omit the 'amen' from the new edition..." (Irene Murdock to Jack Mendelsohn)

That is the way it was. Those who compiled the hymnal were good, committed people living out their values and working for racial justice, but they lived inside a Euro—American cultural hegemony. From inside that cultural bubble they couldn't imagine that African Americans, who were coming in increased numbers because UUs were such visible allies in the area of fair housing and equal access, would like to have their culture reflected in UU worship or that Euro-American would profit as much from

hearing Howard Thurman, Langston Hughes or Gwendolyn Brooks as from Theodore Parker or Walt Whitman.

Cultural myopia impeded their vision. Beyond that there was another reason why this absences went unnoticed. The cutting edge was elsewhere. *Hymns for the Celebration of Life* represented a significant departure from *Hymns for the Spirit*; the latter was biblically-oriented, HCL was not. Throughout the summers the commission met in retreat in Maine they struggled to create a hymnal that would speak to Humanist, Theist and those who still identified as Christian - a difficult task. Much of the commission's attention was consumed in this tug-of-war; the energies required to reach the necessary compromises while managing the temperamental Kenneth Patton were substantial.

Twelve year later a hymnbook entitled *How Can We Keep From Singing!* was published in by the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles, a congregation with a long history of activism. Published in 1976 that hymnal's development began in 1952 during the ministry of Stephen Fritchman, who was considered among the most radical of Unitarian ministers. The membership mirrored his radicalism. In 1967 the initial instigators of the Black UU caucus were members of that Los Angeles congregation and one of them, Jules Ramey, wrote a song entitled, "I Can't Wait Another Hundred Years." It appeared in HCWKF along with the black national anthem "Lift Every Voice and Singing," "We Shall Overcome," "I'm On My Way," "Oh, Freedom," and "De Colores" which was described as the song of the United Farm Workers.

De Colores # 305 in SLT

In 1979, three years after the release of HCWKFS, and in response to the growth of feminist consciousness 25 *Familiar Hymns in New Forms* was published and in 1982 *Hymns in New Forms For Common Worship* came out. In it were 53 recast hymns from *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*, nonetheless it quickly became clear that merely degenderizing the old faithful was inadequate and a new commission called into being.

The UUA Hymnbook Resources Commission was established in 1986. Its members included Mark Belletini as chair, Ellen Johnson-Fay, Helen Pickett, Mark Slegers, Barbara Wagner, Fred Wooden, and originally Fred Wilson, an African American who was later replaced by T.J. Anderson, another African American. The staff liaison, Jacqui James, was also an African American. Instructed by the UUA Board to develop an "inclusive" hymnal the Commission knew it would need to address the issues of degenderization, sexist language, patriarchal imagery and gender balance. However, they went beyond that. In the years prior to the idea of using an "anti-racist, anti-oppression, multi-cultural" framework, the commission at its first gathering quickly came to a consensus that the hymnbook would be multicultural. This meant breaking with an

unwritten, and largely unconscious, rule about singing only “good” music, “good” being code for classical European music. i.e. dead white guy music.

Mark Belletini brought forward another concern. Having grown up in Catholic in Detroit had been exposed to the Black Madonna and also Motown's black culture, he was concerned about the use of white/black light/dark imagery in UU hymnology. Fred Wilson agreed with him and pressed the Commission to deal with the issue of race in the hymnbook. Commission member Fred Wooden was assigned the task of composing a position paper on behalf of the Commission. It was entitled “Is There No Beauty in Darkness?” Some colleagues complained that Fred was making a mountain out of a molehill, others criticized it as an exercise in “political correctness”; and the response of a few Belletini described as “outright ghastly”. On March 8, 1988, in response to the Commission's discussions Jacqui James, delivered a sermon at a UUA chapel service on the topic that was entitled “Affirming Beauty In Darkness.”

Read from *Been in the Storm So Long* “Dark and Light, Light and Dark” (pp.8-9)

When SLT was released in 1993 it offered a wide range of music that included folk, spirituals, and jazz as well as readings by African-American Unitarian Universalists, several taken from the meditation manual *Been in the Storm So Long* that Jacqui James and Mark Morrison-Reed edited in 1991. What it did not include, with three exceptions - the songs “De Colores”, “Duenmete Nino Lindo” (230) and the reading #487 by Roberto Jaurroz - was anything from a Hispanic culture. The hymnal *Las voces des camino* would not appear until 2009 – 16 years later, and its birth was a difficult one.

In the Canadian context, they faced a similar issue: how to reach out to Francophones while having literally no worship resources to which to turn. In an effort to meet this challenge the Canadian Unitarian Council published *Vers un rêve à bâtir/ Fulfilling a Dream* in 2001.

In 2004 the compilation of *Singing the Journey* (STJ) came into being at the request of UUA president Bill Sinkford. As he traveled across the USA and experienced worship in Unitarian Universalist congregations he heard new, contemporary, non-traditional songs being sung and it seemed to him that there was good music out there. He approached the UU Musicians Network (UUMN) and asked them to form a commission to develop a supplement to *Singing the Living Tradition* (SLT). The commission members were all UUMN members and the pieces, largely composed by UUs, in general, avoid traditional hymnody. They were given one year to complete the supplement - much less than the seven years the SLT commission took. That also meant that this group did not have time to have the deeper philosophical discussions the SLT commission had had. In less than a year they blind reviewed 1500 songs.

The *Singing the Journey* commission was chaired by Barbara Wagner, who had been a member of the SLT commission. It also include one person of color, Leon Burke, an African American, composer, and classically trained organist. The hymnal is comprise of 75 hymns. Among these are Native American, calypso, Quaker round, spirituals and folk music in Zulu, Hungarian, Swahili, and in nine there are at least one or more verses in Spanish and one, #1034 “De Noche”, has a verse in French.

Sing “You Gotta Do When the Spirit Says Do” (STJ #1024)

STJ was, indeed, a big leap forward on the UUAs journey toward diversity. It is noteworthy that the compressed publication cycle meant that reflection upon the issues of gender balance, sexist language and diversity was not as self-conscious a process as it had been for the commission that complied SLT. Instead STJ represented what UUs were creating musically and the contemporary consciousness of the STJ commissioners at the turn of the 21st century. It was more reflexive and embodied, given what they received and the time constraints under which they operated, who UUs are at this moment. As commission member, Jason Sheldon, said “What we sing is what we are.”

Bill Sinkford initiated this process in 2004 and STJ was published in 2005. We were just becoming comfortable with the supplement when his term ended in 2009. On my way back to Toronto after the Salt Lake UUA General Assembly, my first since we had announced the change in the relationship of the UUA and CUC in Cleveland in 2001, that I made up my mind. A few hours earlier in a farewell gesture to Bill Sinkford I had been among the 38 ministers of color who stood with him. In 1929 there had been none (In that year J.F Jordan had died and E.E. Brown's had been taken away by the AUA), in 1962 the year after the UUA and CUC were founded there had been eight, in 1988 around 20. To me it represented a sea change; the feeling I felt was hopeful. As I flew back to Toronto I wrote to Jacqui James telling her I had given up waiting for someone else to edit a new meditation manual. Soon twenty years will have passed since she and I had edited *Been in the Storm So Long* and what I saw told me it was time; time had come for us to edit yet another.

In April 2012 *Voices from the Margins* was launched. It has 52 pieces from a very diverse group of 28 contributors. I want to share one that is emblematic of its diversity. Its entitled “An American Flag On My Tasbee” and was written by Iranian-American, Mitra Jafarzadeh. She wrote this to Jacqui, “I must tell you that I grin a lot when thinking about this. You see, it is not a poem written by a poet, but the desperate scrambling of a minister searching for a way to explain identity to her church board. I scrawled this just before a board meeting and without thought beyond the moment. And my heart is pleased that this little bit of ink has touched another.”

Read “An American Flag On My Tasbee” from *Voice from the Margins* (pp. 39-40)

Worship is time set aside when, yearning to be stirred by the sacred, to hear the unexpected, to feel what we too often push away, we awaken to this moment. What we sing, and do not sing - its imagines, language and rhythms - not only tell us who we were but who we are, and shapes who we are becoming. The aspirations we utter and the songs we sing imprint themselves in our beings, or if you will, our souls – that place where intellect, emotion and body, self and community meet and are given voice. Thus, “We sing ourselves into being.”

Let us join in prayer as I offer this prayer from Peter Morales:

Prayer: “Our Work is not yet Done,” *Voices* (p.108)

Silence

Benediction: “Wise Planting” by Emil Gudmundson from *Guarding Sacred Embers* edited by Linda Horton Weaver.

And now, O God

May we have the faith in life to do wise planting,

That the generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we.

May we be reminded of the wise ones of old who admonished,

“If you plan for one year, plant grain;

if you plan for ten years, plant trees;

if you plan for centuries, plant souls.”

May we be bold in bringing to fruition

The golden dreams of kinship and justice.

This we ask that the fields of promise

become fields of reality.

APPENDIX E

OUR PRINCIPLES AND SOURCES

There Are Seven Principles Which Unitarian Universalist Congregations Affirm And Promote:

- ✿ The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- ✿ Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- ✿ Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- ✿ A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- ✿ The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- ✿ The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- ✿ Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Unitarian Universalism (UU) Draws From Many Sources:

- ✿ Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- ✿ Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;

- ✿ Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- ✿ Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- ✿ Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- ✿ Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

APPENDIX F
SOME TRANSLATIONS OF PSALM 137

King James Version

1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down , yea, we wept , when we remembered Zion. **2** We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. **3** For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song ; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. **4** How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? **5** If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. **6** If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. **7** Remember , O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said , Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. **8** O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed ; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. **9** Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Spanish Version

1Junto á los ríos de Babilonia, Allí nos sentábamos, y aun llorábamos,
Acordándonos de Sión.

2Sobre los sauces en medio de ella Colgamos nuestras arpas.

3Y los que allí nos habían llevado cautivos nos pedían que cantásemos, Y los que
nos habían desolado nos pedían alegría, diciendo:

4Cantadnos algunos de los himnos de Sión. ¿Cómo cantaremos canción de Jehová
En tierra de extraños?

5Si me olvidare de ti, oh Jerusalem, Mi diestra sea olvidada.

6Mi lengua se pegue á mi paladar, Si de ti no me acordare; Si no ensalzare á
Jerusalem Como preferente asunto de mi alegría.

7Acuérdate, oh Jehová, de los hijos de Edom En el día de Jerusalem; Quienes
decían: Arrasadla, arrasadla Hasta los cimientos.

8Hija de Babilonia destruída, Bienaventurado el que te diere el pago De lo que tú
nos hiciste.

9Bienaventurado el que tomará y estrellará tus niños Contra las piedras.

Psalms Chapter 137 תהלים (Hebrew)

א על נהרות, בבל--שם ישבנו, גם-בכינו: בזכרנו,
את-ציון.

1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we
sat down, yea, we wept, when we
remembered Zion.

ב על-עצרים בתוכה-- תלינו, בנרותינו.

2 Upon the willows in the midst
thereof we hanged up our harps.

ג כי שם שאלונו שובינו, דברי-שיר-- ותוללנו
שמה:
שירו לנו, משיר ציון.

3 For there they that led us captive
asked of us words of song, and our
tormentors asked of us mirth: {N}
'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'

ד איך--נשיר את-שיר-יהוה: על, אדמת נכר.

4 How shall we sing the LORD'S
song in a foreign land?

ה אם-אשכחך ירושלם-- תשכח ימיני.

5 If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let
my right hand forget her cunning.

ו תדבק-לשוני, לחכי-- אם-לא אזכרכי:
אם-לא אעלה, את-ירושלם-- על, ראש שמחתי.

6 Let my tongue cleave to the roof of
my mouth, if I remember thee not; {N}
if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy.

ז זכר יהוה, לבני אדום-- את, יום ירושלם:
האמרים, ערו ערו-- עד, היסוד בזה.

7 Remember, O LORD, against the
children of Edom the day of Jerusalem; {N}
who said: 'Rase it, rase it, even to the
foundation thereof.'

ח בת-בבל, השדודה:
אשרי שישלם-לה-- את-גמולה, שגמלת לנו.

8 O daughter of Babylon, that art to
be destroyed; {N}
happy shall he be, that repayeth thee as thou
hast served us.

ט אשרי, שיאחז ונפץ את-עלליה-- אל-הסלע.

9 Happy shall he be, that taketh and
dasheth thy little ones against the rock. {P}

APPENDIX G

RESEARCH DATA FROM THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Questions used in the Qualitative Analysis

1. I hope to tap into UU themes that are not necessarily the UU principles or sources. So, I am trying to find stories that resonant with UUs because they are part of our identity but that are broader than the principles. For example, I think one theme is that we are called to do social justice work to make a world a better place and not because good works is a pathway to heaven.

What themes have you noticed in the worship at the congregation(s) you serve?

2. What stories and songs do you find that you keep turning to in worship or religious education? These are stories or songs that are used often throughout several years.

3. Is there a particular genre of music that you use in worship or is it mixed? Please identify some kinds of music you have in worship in your congregation.

4. Finally, I was raised a Methodist by my parents. Every church we went to sang the same hymns and even today my body responds to these childhood hymns before my mind even catches up. I call these hymns *soul hymns*. I find having been a UU now for over 20 years that this is true for me now with some UU hymns or songs. Do you think there are songs or hymns from our tradition

that does this for you and our congregations? Do you know songs outside of the UU hymnal that resonant with UU congregations? *What are your soul hymns?*

Please list.

Major Themes (extrapolated from 7 pages of data)

- Transcendence
- Hope and Love
- Gratitude
- Diversity
- Community
- Brokenness and Wholeness
- Generosity and Abundance

Stories in Unitarian Universalist Worship

The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life

- Stories of Human Resilience
- Life Experiences (personal, call, chaplaincy, suffering, grief)
- Future is coming fast
- Personal testimonies
- Holiday related stories

Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love

- Civil Rights
- American Revolution
- Declaration of Independence
- Long Road to Women's Suffrage
- MLK
- Other stories from various Social Justice movements

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life

- Noah's Pudding (Muslim)
- Jakata Tales
- Buddhist Tradition/Buddha
- Creation stories from all traditions
- Golden Rule/Platinum rule
- Mustard Seed (from Buddhism)
- Wisdom Stories from the World's Religions
- Holidays

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves

- Job
- The Good Samaritan

- Prodigal Son
- Bible Stories
- Jewish tradition
- Rachel Naomi Remen or Hassidic stories
- stories related to Holocaust
- Jacob and Esau
- King David
- Hosea
- Christian v Less Christian
- Holiday related stories
- Yiddish Feather Pillow Gossip Stories
- Moses
- Joseph
- Jesus

Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit

- Aesop's Fables
- Stone Soup
- Somebody Loves You Mr. Hatch
- Folk Tales
- Nordic Myths
- The Little Engine That Could
- The Little Red Hen

- The Emperor's New Clothes

Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature

- Holiday related stories especially around Solstice/Equinox
- Rites of Passage
- Coming of Age
- Stories of Human Resilience
- Life Experiences (personal, call, chaplaincy, suffering, grief)
- Future is coming fast
- Personal testimonies

Unitarian Universalist stories of our history and heritage

- John Murray
- Thomas Potter
- Olympia Brown
- Hosea Ballou
- Michael Servetus
- George de Benneville
- Louisa May Alcott (Little Women and personal)
- James Luther Adams
- Curtis Reed
- Two who Dared
- UU Stories
- Flower Celebration

- Origin of the Chalice
- Stories of the Congregation
- Congregation Founders
- Legacy of the Church

Most often heard Hymns

- Spirit of Life
- For All That Is Our Life
- Love Will guide Us
- Come, Come Whoever You Are
- Let it Be a Dance We Do
- Gather the Spirit
- Guide My Feet
- Enter, Rejoice and Come In
- Gathered Here

Definition of a *Soul Hymn* as referred to in the questions

- The songs or hymns that you hear that stay with you even years later.
- The songs or hymns that your body and heart know even before your mind can catch up (and sometimes it doesn't)
- The songs or hymns you hum when you are not in church

Soul Hymns/Songs

- Spirit of Life
- Blue Boat Home
- Standing on the Side of Love
- May Nothing Evil Cross this Door
- Love Will Guide Us
- Gather the Spirit
- The Fire of Commitment
- Rank by Rank
- Here we Have Gathered
- Gathered Here
- Let it be a Dance
- If I Had A Hammer
- Swimming to the Other Side
- Keep on Movin' Forward
- Blowin' in the Wind
- Where Have All the Flowers Gone
- We Are the Ones We Are Waiting For
- Holy Now
- Hallelujah
- Imagine
- All You Need is Love

Genre of Music

Diverse, rich, extensive, inclusive, original and from other traditions.

APPENDIX H THE STORIES WE LIVE IN

**Rev. Bob Janis Dillon and Rev. Tracy Sprowls
Workshop at the District Annual Meeting 2014**

Song: When our Heart is in a Holy Place (Joyce Poley)

When our heart is in a holy place (x2)
We are blessed with love and amazing grace
When our heart is in a holy place
Amazing Grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a soul like me
I once was lost but now I'm found
Was blind but now I see
When our heart is in a holy place (x2)
We are blessed with love and amazing grace
When our heart is in a holy place

Story and Welcome

The Stories we Live In, part I: Identity; Worship; Music

Song: Spirit of Life (Carolyn McDade)

Spirit of Life, come unto me.
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

The Stories we Live In, part II: Stories; www.ourstoriesandsongs.com

Sharing

Story

Song: Ours is a simple faith (Mustard's Retreat)

Benediction

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